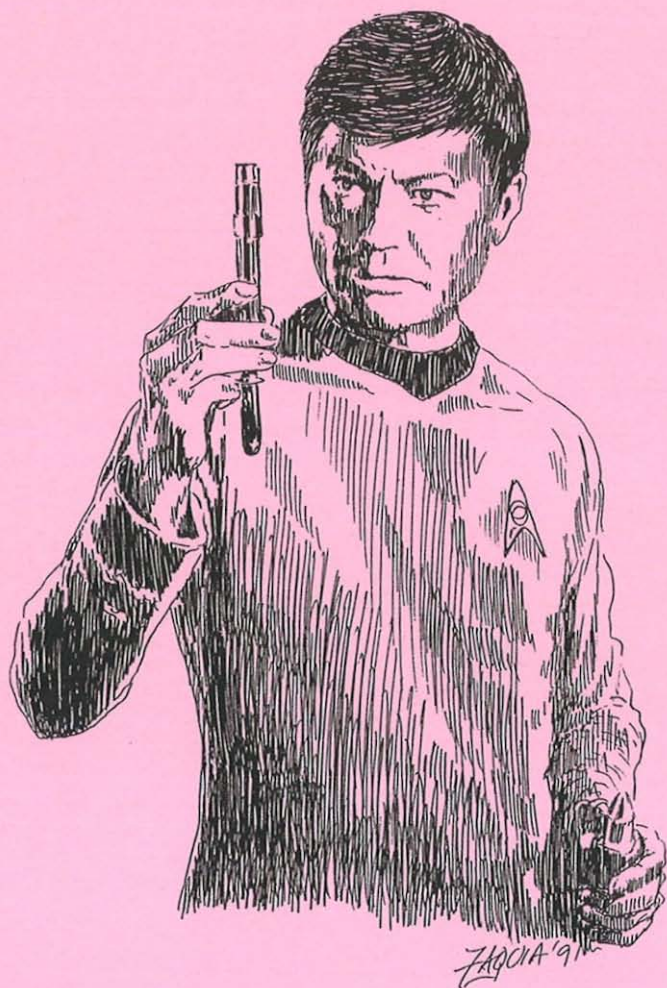


ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES 93



CONTENTS

Forgotten Symphony	by Rosemarie Heaton	P 3
<i>(What do Spock, Uhura and Sulu have in common - and why are they missing?)</i>		
Moss Beneath a Stone	by Alan Boag	P 28
Holy Orders	by David Gallagher	P 29
The Time of the Rains	by Linda A. Carter	P 30
<i>(Amanda is in danger from an alien life form. Sarek fights for her life.)</i>		
Mercy's Errand	by M. Sadler	P 56
Axanar	by Alex Blakeney	P 57
<i>(McCoy reveals the one thing that can embarrass Kirk)</i>		
Message from Kollos	by Helen Connor	P 64
An Alien Wind	by Alan Boag	P 65
<i>(Nothing can stop a Klingon Assault Group. Kang knows that.)</i>		
Thoughts in Silence Kept	by Helen Connor	P 75
Mirror Mirror Revisited	by David Gallagher	P 76
To Fly Away	by Pen Cramphorn	P 77
<i>(The inhabitants of three worlds have been driven insane.)</i>		
Space Traveller	by M. Sadler	P 86
Mind Games	by Jean Sloan	P 87
<i>(Spock is injured during the ceremony to transfer his aunt's katra.)</i>		
A Star Trekker's Wish	by Christine Jones	P 98
We Three Trekkers	by Christine Jones	P 99
Observing Distant Planets	by Linda A. Carter	P 100

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FORGOTTEN SYMPHONY

by

Rosemarie Heaton

McCoy stirred fitfully, sat up rather groggily and groaned. He rested his head on his hands for a moment, until it stopped whirling, then cautiously lifted it and peered around him. The rest of the party were still lying comatose. He closed his eyes again and breathed deeply as he tried to remember what had happened. There was still a slight taint in the air but the gas was obviously dissipating quickly; if he listened carefully he could just hear the hiss of air vents.

Now he could think about moving without feeling nauseous he looked round for his medi-kit. He frowned as he eventually spotted it lying across the other side of the small dimly-lit room. As his head cleared even further he realised that this was definitely not the room they had first entered.

"Damn," he growled as he made his unsteady way to collect the medi-kit. Suddenly a thought struck him and he counted the bodies lying around him. His mind cleared completely and he scrambled at his belt for his communicator at the same time as he knelt by the nearest man's side.

"McCoy to Enterprise. Come in, Enterprise," he snapped. A dismal howl of static answered him and he glared at the gadget. "Damn fine time to break down," he grumbled and tried again. The same response evoked a curse and he flung the communicator down and concentrated on his first-aid.

Five minutes later a still slightly muzzy Giotto was trying out his

communicator and McCoy had moved on to the rest of the party. As he worked steadily through the group he watched Giotto alternately try to raise the ship and prow round the edges of the room.

Eventually the four of them sat and stared at one another. Giotto gave a succinct summary of their position. "We're missing Uhura. I can't raise the ship and there's no visible door."

"How about the other landing party?" McCoy asked.

"We're not likely to pick them up if we can't raise the ship, surely?" a rather querulous voice said.

"That's not necessarily true, Benson," Giotto said and saw a nod of agreement from the fourth member of their contingent. He flipped open his communicator and proceeded to try and contact the other group. The same howl of static answered him and he looked over to Maggie Palmer. "You've probably got a better idea of the frequencies that will work down here. Give Benson a hand to locate the most likely one for the ship and then you continue trying Mr. Spock. While you're doing that we can go over everything we can remember." He turned to McCoy. "Right, Doctor. You were first to come to. Did you notice anything unusual?"

"The whole damn thing's unusual, Giotto," McCoy muttered sourly. As he noticed the Security Chief's frown McCoy shrugged and said, "It took me a couple of minutes to really come round. The first thing I did after that was to look for my

medi-kit. I found it across the room and while I was on my way to pick it up I realised that Uhura was missing. I tried my communicator then started to wake you all up. That's about it." There was a moment's silence then he said gruffly, 'I wish we could get in contact with someone else. I'd even welcome Spock's voice at the moment.'

"Why do you think you had to wake all of us up but you came round all by yourself, Doctor?" Palmer asked.

"Do you know, I don't really know," McCoy said after a short pause for thought. "All things being equal, I suppose, it should have been you, Giotto." He rubbed his chin. "However, I don't think it means anything. It's probably got more to do with different tolerances. Still, it won't do any harm to think about this for a while."

"Does anyone remember anything after we walked through that door into wherever it was?" Giotto asked.

They all shook their heads.

"No, sir," Lt. Palmer answered for everyone. "In fact I don't remember much after Mr. Spock told us which building to look at." She added quickly, "Do you think Uhura's okay, sir?"

"Let's hope we all are, Lieutenant," Giotto answered rather shortly. He turned back to McCoy. "What about the air supply, Doctor?"

"That seems okay, I heard air vents when I came round. Hey... I remember now. I could smell gas when I came round."

"Gas?" Benson sounded interested for the first time since he had woken up.

"Yeah, and it was something I think

I should recognise..." McCoy trailed off.

"Doctor, I can't hear air vents now," Giotto said tensely. "If there's no air exchange how long do you think we can last?"

"Uh?" said McCoy. He looked around him. "I'm not sure, I can't tell how big this room is. This light does nothing for my eyesight. I don't think we need to worry, though; I could barely hear them when I was the only one conscious. We're making far too much noise for us to hear them now."

Giotto waved them all to silence and sighed in relief when the faint hiss of circulating air reached his ears. None of them had anything further to say and the uneasy silence was only interrupted by the attempts of Benson and Palmer to contact someone. Time seemed to pass very slowly. McCoy and Giotto exchanged an occasional worried glance. They were both very conscious of the danger of their position. Even if the air was good they still lacked both food and water and they had no idea how long the ship would take to find them.

After a while Maggie Palmer said, "I think the interference is being caused by a locally generated field. I can't tell if it's a deliberate attempt at jamming or whether it's only noisy machinery. The outcome's the same, either way. It's definitely strong enough to block all our signals." She looked up from her communicator. "What puzzles me is that as far as I know there isn't any working equipment on this planet."

"Maybe Mr. Spock's sensors weren't working properly." McCoy's attempt at levity fell sadly flat.

"Mr. Spock must be looking for us by now," Mark Benson said a little later.

"If he hasn't been caught in the same trap," McCoy answered morosely.

"In that case the Captain will be turning this place inside out," Giotto said cheerfully while he directed a glare at the oblivious Doctor.

McCoy was looking at the down-bent head of Maggie Palmer. "What is it, Maggie?" he asked gently.

She glanced up at him and smiled shakily. "I'm just wondering where Uhura is. I hope she's okay."

"You know, to my mind that's the biggest puzzle of all," McCoy said. "I mean, why only Uhura? I've been trying to think of a reason. It's not as though she was the only woman with us or even our only communications expert. Damn! I do wish I knew what's going on." He stood up impatiently. "I'm getting slightly claustrophobic stuck in here."

"That's enough, Doctor," Giotto said firmly.

McCoy's head snapped round in surprise. They glared at each other then McCoy apologised wordlessly and sat back down.

"What do you think the source of this light could be, Mark?" he asked conversationally.

The young man looked surprised and shook his head. "I'm an anthropologist not a physicist, Doctor," he said, but it was obvious that McCoy's question had done its intended deed. His expression had lightened considerably and he was staring around him with interest. "The light seems to emanate directly from the walls. I suppose it's either a chemical or nuclear reaction, although I guess it could be biological in origin. I remember reading something fairly recently about a

culture that uses light-producing bacteria. They coat surfaces with them, and given a certain amount of heat the bacteria produce light." He got up and walked across to the nearest wall. "This stuff's warm to the touch and it gives very slightly. I'd say that it's manufactured, not natural," he finished.

"I've just remembered something about that large room we went into. It was really light and airy, there were lots of windows and those walls were definitely stone. I remember touching one of them just before Uhura started recording," Palmer said excitedly.

Giotto and McCoy looked at each other. "Was Uhura recording anything in particular?" the Security Chief asked her.

"No. I don't think so," she answered. "I think she was just doing a general sweep. All that stonework was covered in carvings. Don't you remember? That's really why Uhura and I were included in the landing party. Mr. Spock thought the carvings were probably writing of some kind."

"Yes, of course. Now how did we forget that?" Giotto mused.

"Probably a side-effect of whatever knocked us out," McCoy answered him.

They all sat and stared at each other for another minute or two before Giotto turned to Benson and Palmer.

"I take it you're still having no luck with those communicators?" he asked.

They both said, "No, sir."

Palmer continued, "I've activated the emergency trace signal. There should be enough battery power to let that run for several days." She shrugged. "Other than that, unless the field generator cuts

out we've no way of breaking through the interference."

"This generating field. Is that what's keeping us locked up?" McCoy asked.

"I imagine so." Giotto tried to stifle a yawn as he answered. "One good thing, I don't suppose we're likely to get surprised in here so I suggest we try and get some rest."

Nobody had any other suggestion so McCoy and Palmer started to settle themselves. Benson moved closer to Giotto.

"Sir," he said tentatively, "I'm not used to things like this. I... I er... need to..."

Giotto nodded understandingly. "I know exactly what you mean." He got up and started to walk round the room, peering closely at the walls as he did so. Benson followed him. "If this is meant to be a prison cell then there must be sanitary facilities somewhere," the grey-haired Security man said by way of explanation.

"Well I suppose that really depends on who or what they usually lock up here." All of a sudden Benson sounded very shaky.

Giotto looked at him sharply and seemed on the point of issuing a reprimand when a voice from the vicinity of the floor drawled, "If you're going to carry on a conversation, do it more quietly, will you."

"Sorry, Doctor," was the automatic answer. To Benson, Giotto said, "You go that way and we'll meet over there. You said this material was warm?" At the boy's nod Giotto continued, "Right, let's see if there's any change in texture or

temperature from ground to head-height. We also need to designate a corner as a latrine." He pointed to the corner furthest away from them. "Let's make it that one," he suggested.

"Good idea," McCoy mumbled. Both he and Margaret Palmer had given up any pretence of sleeping. "Another good idea is for us to help you look," he continued as he stood up and stretched. Much to Benson's relief the others turned away from him and McCoy continued talking. "Are you thinking that a change in the wall's material might mean a door, Giotto?"

"That's one possibility, Doctor; and it is also possible that any mechanism might be touch-sensitive," the burly Security Chief answered.

"God, you sound just like Spock. You been taking lessons?" McCoy muttered.

Giotto snorted. "I wouldn't mind sounding like him, especially if I had his capabilities. And," he added deliberately, "just at the moment I definitely wouldn't mind his ability to get out of prison cells. Shall we get started, then?" he finished rather pointedly.

Obediently, they all followed his bidding. It took them what seemed hours and they were all hot, tired and thirsty by the time they had finished. As they flopped in the centre of the room, Mark Benson looked up at the dim ceiling.

"How tall were these people?" he asked idly.

No-one knew and Giotto asked, "Why?"

"The ceiling looks a long way away. If they were much taller than us then maybe I should go around the room with

my arms at full-stretch."

Maggie Palmer shook her head. "They can't have been all that much taller, Mark. The architecture's wrong. If you remember, everything's on a similar scale to our own."

The young man shrugged. "Just an idea," he said.

"How long can we survive in here?" Palmer asked abruptly.

McCoy pursed his lips. "I'm not sure. With water, days. Without? Who knows; but we'll be out of here long before that. Jim will make sure of that, Maggie. What I'd really like to know is why we've been locked up, where Uhura is and why that damn Vulcan is taking so long. The ship should have been able to scan us by now."

"The interference the communicators are picking up is acting like a jamming field. They may not be able to pin-point us clearly, and even if they could, beaming us through an electronically generated field could be very dangerous," Palmer said with commendable calmness.

"Great, Maggie. I really needed to hear that," McCoy grunted.

"You did ask, Doctor," she answered smartly.

"I'm interested in your first questions, McCoy." Giotto's voice was firm. "Exactly why where you and Lieutenant Uhura both down here, Maggie?"

"Mr. Spock and Lt. Morris thought that some of the carvings looked like a variant on a particular extinct language. One of Uhura's hobbies is old languages so Mr. Spock asked her to come down

and take a look. I came down because I'm interested in the subject although I don't have Uhura's expertise."

"So Uhura could have been kidnapped for her linguistic capabilities?" Mark Benson's voice showed his incredulity.

"It's just as likely an explanation as the fact that she's female, Benson," Giotto snapped.

"This is a dead planet. There's no life signs. Spock's estimate of the last time anything living walked on this planet surface is between 3 and 4,000 years," McCoy intervened.

Giotto sighed and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mark. I guess the wait is beginning to get to me." He changed the subject. "Maggie, is your emergency signal still going?"

"Yes, and I reckon it's good for quite a while yet."

Silence fell yet again. They really had nothing to talk about; all any of them could do was hope. Gradually even despite their hunger and thirst, they all fell into an uneasy sleep.

None of them had any idea of how long they had been dozing but they were woken abruptly by a blinding light and loud noise. They all shot upright and stared in disbelief at the apparition in front of them. Gradually as their heartbeats returned to normal they recognised the bluff features of Commander Scott.

"My god, it's good to see you, Scotty." McCoy's statement was echoed by the rest.

"How did you find us?" Giotto asked when they had calmed down

slightly.

"Och, the lassie's comm signal, o' course." The Engineer grinned at them

"It broke through the jamming field?" Palmer sounded surprised.

"No, but the field intensity dropped a couple of hours ago. We pin-pointed you more or less straight away but it took us a while to figure how to get you out of here," Scott said.

"You mean Spock couldn't work it out?" McCoy crowed.

"No. I mean Spock's missing." Scott's grin faded.

"What?" McCoy was shocked.

"As well as Uhura?" Palmer added.

Scott stared at them as he registered that there really were only four of them. He said slowly, "Not just Mr. Spock but Lt. Sulu as well." He watched as consternation dawned on their faces then said grimly, "The Captain isnae goin' to be pleased about this."

"Pleased isn't the word I'd have used, Scotty," McCoy said morosely. "Anyway, where is Jim?"

"Over the other side of town. Where we found the rest of Mr. Spock's party."

"Well let's get over there then. We've got a lot of thinking to do." Giotto was all ready on his way.

"No," McCoy barked.

Giotto stopped in mid-stride and turned back, his surprise evident. "What...?" he began.

"We go back to the ship, first," McCoy said more quietly. "I want us all checked out before we start doing anything else."

Giotto looked at him for a few moments and then gave in. "Whatever you say, Doctor."

That victory in the bag McCoy turned his blue glare on the waiting Engineer. "Scotty, I want you to make sure the decontamination procedure's set for all of us, and that includes the Captain's party."

As the Scot signalled for beam-up McCoy said quietly to him, "Let Jim know where we are and get him to send the others up as soon as possible, will you?"

"Aye, Leonard. Dinna worry about him. I'll get him back up," Scott said just as quietly.

It was warm where she was lying and she cuddled back against the warmth and sighed luxuriously. Suddenly she sat bolt upright at the realisation that everything was not as it should be. Very cautiously she looked round, and gasped as she saw her companion. Finding herself in such close proximity to the ship's First Officer was decidedly unnerving, especially when they had not even been in the same landing party before...

A low chuckle broke into her thoughts and she gasped again. "Sulu," she said severely when she had regained her composure.

"Uhura," the Helmsman, all signs of laughter wiped from his face, replied.

"What? I mean, where are we? What happened? How did you and Mr.

Spock get here, and where's everyone else?" She asked the questions in rapid succession, allowing Sulu no chance to reply.

"I don't know." He shook his head. "I'm sorry I wasn't here when you came round. I was surveying our kingdom," he finished ironically and gestured round the room.

Uhura looked around her. The room was fairly large but empty of any furnishings. It was well lit and there was no door. She swallowed hard, caught Sulu's eye and then turned back to the Vulcan.

"Is Mr. Spock all right?" she asked anxiously.

Sulu had turned with her and they stood looking at the unconscious figure. "I don't know," he said. "I wish I did. How do you feel?" he asked her pointedly.

Uhura stopped to consider the unexpected question. "Different," she said thoughtfully, "although I can't say why."

Sulu nodded. "I'm the same. I feel as though I've been put through one of McCoy's physicals and then some."

"Yes, that does about sum it up." Pursing her lips she asked, "But if we're both awake, why isn't he?"

"Anybody's guess would be as good as mine." Sulu shrugged as he sat down.

"Why are you sitting down?" she asked tartly. His shrug had irritated her.

"Nothing else to do," he said simply.

"What do you mean, nothing else to do, Lieutenant?" Uhura snapped. "How

about finding a way out of here, for one. Have you tried your communicator, for another?"

His patience snapped along with hers. "If you've got your communicator then that's more than I have. And, if you can find a door, I'll follow you out of it." Seeing her move towards Spock he said, "He hasn't got his, either. I've already checked."

Uhura sat back on her heels and looked at him for a moment. "Sorry," she said eventually. "I should have known you'd have done all that."

"It's okay," he muttered. "I guess I'm just not used to feeling hopeless." He looked consideringly at Spock. "Should we try and wake him?"

"No." She shook her head decisively. "Not yet. I think we should see what we can work out first. When he does come round he's going to want to know everything we know," she waved a hand, "about all this."

"Let's move away a bit then. There'll be less chance of us disturbing him."

"He is still alive, isn't he?" As she stood up Uhura voiced her biggest fear.

"Yes. I eventually managed to find a pulse. Not that I know what it means though. I'm not up in Vulcan physiology," Sulu said worriedly.

"Who is?" she asked him.

They sat back down near enough to see if Spock stirred and hopefully far enough away not to disturb him. As they did they exchanged glances and knew that neither of them was prepared for a contingency that included Spock without him being totally in charge of himself as

well as those with him.

When Scott materialised in the small square in front of the main section of the ruins Captain James T. Kirk stopped his irritable pacing.

"Where's McCoy? Is everyone all right?" he demanded.

"McCoy and the others have gone back up to the ship," Scott replied. "Everyone seems okay but the Doctor wanted to check them out and he asked me to get you to send the rest of Mr. Spock's party up pretty soon, sir."

Kirk sighed. "Yes. Of course." After a pregnant pause while he waited for Scott to say something more Kirk gave in. "Come on. Out with it, Scotty. What's the bad news?"

"Lieutenant Uhura's missing," the Scot said gloomily.

"Uhura?" Kirk was startled. "What? Just what in heaven's name is going on down here?" he appealed to the world in general. He waved away Scott's attempt to answer. "Let's get back to the ship. Maybe we'll get a clearer picture from up there." He paused for a moment. "What I don't understand is why three competent officers, all of whom were carrying communicators yet none of them have initiated an emergency signal." He sounded slightly exasperated but Scott knew this was just a cover for his anxiety.

"Maybe they canna," Scott voiced everyone else's fears.

Their small party was held in the transporter chamber while decontamination proceeded. As soon as they were released Kirk directed the remaining members of Spock's party to

Sickbay.

"Ask Doctor McCoy to call me when he's finished, and I want all of you to record everything you can remember about the last few hours. And I mean everything," he added tightly. As they left he turned to Scott. "Let's you and me head for the Bridge and see what we can see from there."

Once on the Bridge, Kirk turned to the science station. "Morris, any change?" he asked abruptly.

"No, sir. None that I can see, at any rate. Maybe Mr. Spock'll have a better idea."

Kirk stared at her then stalked to his chair, leaving Scott to inform the Bridge crew of the missing officers.

Morris blushed. "Sorry, sir. I'll have another look." Industiously she turned back to the sensors and began running the scans again.

Kirk and Scott exchanged glances behind her back and waited silently for her report. Some ten minutes later she straightened up and said firmly, "Nothing, sir. Absolutely nothing. If they are still down there then they're shielded by something our sensors can't even recognise let alone penetrate."

"O' course they're still doon there," Scott spluttered.

Kirk shook his head at him. "Are you saying there is absolutely nothing out of the ordinary that you can pin-point down there, Lieutenant?"

"I'm saying that's what the sensors are saying, sir." Her manner was firm and collected. After a few seconds she continued, "I'm running a correlation with the results over the seventy-two

hours we've been here, just in case." She stopped and turned back to her instruments.

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Kirk turned to the Communications Officer. "Open ship-wide for me, will you."

Soon his voice echoed through corridors and rooms. "This is the Captain speaking. We have rescued most of the missing crew from the planet surface; however we are still missing three crewmembers. These are Commander Spock and Lieutenants Uhura and Sulu. Now we know they must still be down there because there is no other traffic within light years of this system, but so far we have found no trace of them on the planet surface. What I want you all to do is think carefully about the last three days and if you can think of anything unusual I want to know about it immediately. Thank you."

In Sickbay McCoy shook his head. If Jim was clutching at straws like that he must be seriously worried. It took only a little more thought before he admitted to himself that he was seriously worried as well. He sighed deeply then heard an anxious voice asking, "What is it, Doctor? Have you found something?"

He lifted his head from the instrument he was studying to focus on the concerned face of Ensign Schmidt. "No, no," he said quickly. "You check out as clean as the rest of us. I was just wondering about the Captain's message."

The youngster nodded. "Do you think we'll find them, Doctor?"

"If Jim Kirk's involved then there's no doubt we'll find them. It might just take a little longer than if Mr. Spock was doing the looking along with the Captain. As it is, maybe we'll get on that little bit quicker if you were to go and record your

memories like you were asked." He smiled as he watched the Ensign exit Sickbay with alacrity.

Twenty minutes later, having saved the results of the medicals and his own impressions of the past few days, he reached for the intercom. "Bridge," he said gruffly.

Kirk answered him. "Yes, Doctor?"

"You asked me to let you know when I'd finished those checks, Captain. Well, they're finished - for what it's worth."

"Nothing?" Kirk really did not need to ask. McCoy's voice had told him all he needed to know.

"Nothing. We're all exactly the same as we were when we went down there. I just don't understand it. Why those three? What have they got in common that no-one else has?"

Kirk gave a quick glance round the Bridge. "I'll meet you in my quarters, Bones. Ten minutes, okay?"

"Sure, sure. I was doing nothing anyway. McCoy out."

By the time McCoy reached Kirk's quarters the Captain was already reading through some of the depositions from the landing parties. He waved McCoy to a chair. "Sorry to cut you off so abruptly, Bones, but..."

"No need, Jim. Just me and my big mouth." The Doctor sat down after pouring himself a drink. He sipped the hot coffee appreciatively. "How come you always get good coffee?" he asked idly.

Kirk grinned slightly. "RHIP, Doctor." He tapped the side of his nose. "Need to know only."

"Very funny, Captain. Any luck?" he continued.

"No." Kirk shook his head. "I've got the archaeology section running through everything that's known about this damned place. I was just waiting for you before tackling Spock's logs."

McCoy raised his eyebrows. "Well, here I am. Oh, there's my report on the landing parties and my memories, for what any of them are worth." He sounded slightly depressed and Kirk looked at him narrowly.

"What did you mean before about what do they have in common?" he asked his friend.

"Exactly that." McCoy leaned forward seriously. "Presumably they were taken because of something they all have that the rest of us haven't. There were ten of us in those landing parties, Jim, and seven of us are back up here. Sure, we were hidden away, but obviously we were not wanted by whatever it is that's got the other three. I've gone over it time and time again. We had plenty of time to think down there. We were mixed parties; different sexes, different specialities, but I can think of nothing that would make anyone pick out those three from the rest of us."

"Nothing at all? Spock's IQ must outstrip everybody else's on board ship," Kirk said.

"Sure, but neither Uhura nor Sulu are anywhere near second. Spock's unique in many ways and I can see someone kidnapping him, but why take Sulu and Uhura as well? I just don't understand it, Jim. Not in the least," he

finished gruffly.

Kirk looked at him. "I agree, Bones. Don't think I don't but there has to be *something*." He stood up, stretched and rubbed the back of his neck. "The sensor readings show exactly what we were told to expect. Although Morris said that Spock might see something that she can't."

"That's the difficulty of having a Science Officer who thinks like a machine, you know, Jim," McCoy said grumpily.

Kirk ignored him and flipped Spock's recent science logs onto the screen. McCoy stopped grumbling and they both watched closely as their friend solemnly reported his Department's findings to date.

As the files came to an end McCoy looked at Kirk and said, "Personal log?"

"No, not just yet. If there had been an anomaly that Spock thought he had enough information on it would have been in the Science Department's logs." Kirk was firm. He switched off and looked at McCoy. "I've a meeting with the landing parties and Mr. Scott scheduled for 16.30 hours. I'm in sore need of food before then, and so I should think are you. Coming?" He did not wait for an answer but headed for the Mess with McCoy doing his best to keep up with him.

Dejectedly Uhura and Sulu sat back down after checking that the Vulcan was still unconscious. They had talked themselves out and searched every inch of wall and floor that they could reach.

"What do we do now?" Sulu asked.

"I wish I knew," the Bantu woman answered. She looked over towards Spock. "Do you think we should try and rouse him? Surely he shouldn't still be out."

Sulu nodded and they knelt down next to the still body. Looking closely they could just discern the faint rise and fall of his chest. Uhura leant forward and shook him, gently at first then with more vigour as he did not respond.

"What else can we try?" she asked as her ministrations met with no success.

"Slap him? Throw water over him?" Sulu's suggestion were met with a scowl. "You did ask," he said softly. "Talking of water, I could do with a drink."

The scowl deepened as Uhura focussed her full attention on her friend. "So could I, which I was trying to ignore until you mentioned it." She stood up stiffly. "Not only that, but I'm hungry and I need to use the bathroom."

"I know exactly what you mean, Uhura," Sulu said fervently. "What I don't understand is why someone or something should go to the trouble of collecting and examining us then lock us away and forget about us. And what's worse, seems willing to let Mr. Spock die rather than give us help. It just doesn't make sense," he finished angrily. "Damn it all to hell," he yelled and swung a punch at the nearest wall.

Nursing his hand he turned sheepishly towards Uhura who was staring past at the wall behind him. Sulu swung round and his mouth dropped open at the sight of the small table and its contents.

"Is that real or are we hallucinating?" he asked very quietly.

"Tell me what you can see and then I'll answer your question." Uhura moved closer to the table, obviously expecting it to disappear. Sulu followed her.

"Water, bread, fruit, cheese. At least I suppose that's meant to be cheese," he said.

She nodded. "All present and correct, Lieutenant. Do you want to try them first or will we go together?"

He laughed slightly shakily. "Maybe it's this world's equivalent of the pomegranate."

Uhura looked at him sharply. "Why bother? We're well and truly stuck here anyway, aren't we?"

"True," he admitted and reached greedy hands for the tall jug of water. Uhura passed him two of the goblets and he filled them to the brim before putting the jug down carefully.

"Bottoms up," he said with a touch of bravado. Uhura raised her glass to him and they drank thirstily.

A slight sound behind them made them turn. Spock shifted his position again as they watched. Quickly Uhura put her glass down and poured water into the last one. Crossing the room she knelt down next to the Vulcan and carefully raised his head.

"Here, let me do that. You try and get some water down him."

Sulu's strong hands replaced hers and he half-lifted Spock into a sitting position. Uhura placed the glass at Spock's lips and said encouragingly, "Mr. Spock, try and drink some of this water. You'll feel better afterwards." As she did so she was conscious of an insane wish to giggle. *Of all the inane things to say, she*

thought.

Spock stirred weakly and the glass tilted slightly, spilling some of its contents over him. He groaned and his eyes opened. He swallowed painfully and Uhura offered him the water again. This time he took a sip and then another one before his eyes closed and he went limp in Sulu's grasp.

"Damn!" Sulu gasped. "He's heavy," he said by way of explanation as he gently laid his senior officer back down on the floor. "For a moment there I thought he was going to come round." He stared at Spock for a long moment. "I really don't like this, Uhura. Did it seem, to you, as though he was in pain?"

"Yes, it did. Do you suppose that whatever was done to us could have affected him differently? He is Vulcan, after all." It was obvious that she was extremely worried. "What are we going to do? He needs help we can't possibly give him."

"I agree; but we have discovered one thing, you know."

"Somebody or thing is listening in to us all the time?"

"So it would seem." Another groan steeled his resolve. "Whoever you are, Mr. Spock needs medical attention. Please let us go."

"All in good time." The soft voice surprised them both.

Uhura recovered first. "What do you mean, all in good time? Mr. Spock needs help now, not later!"

"When the ordinary ones have gone then you will have everything you need. Until then you must contain your impatience." The voice seemed to

surround them and they felt a wave of contentment wash over and through them. Stubbornly they struggled free.

"Mr. Spock could be dead by then. He'll be of no use to you then, will he? We must have help, for we don't know what's wrong with him. Can't you get Doctor McCoy?" Uhura's voice showed a slight tinge of fear as she pleaded with their unknown gaoler.

"And just what do you mean by the ordinary ones?" Sulu asked suspiciously.

The voice was tinged with surprise. "Those who held you captive, of course."

"Captive?" Uhura heard the squeak in her voice. "What are you talking about? You're the one doing that."

"I have told you that I will let you go when the ordinary ones have gone." The voice was beginning to sound slightly petulant. "I rescued you. Why do you complain so much?"

A hoarse voice behind them said calmly, "I would advise caution, Lieutenants. It does not understand you."

"Mr. Spock!" they exclaimed together. Ignoring the voice for the moment they turned to their companion.

"Are you all right?" Uhura asked.

"I am functional. However I would be grateful for some more water, Lieutenant." Spock's hoarse voice galvanised Uhura over to the table. "Mr. Sulu, could you ask it why it thought we were being held captive? Also please enquire if it has a name." The brief conversation seemed to exhaust him and with a worried look at Uhura, Sulu turned back to their captor.

"I apologise if you thought we were

complaining. It's just that our companion needs medical attention that we cannot provide." He paused for a moment then said, "Do you have a name? Something we can call you?"

There was silence for a few minutes and Sulu sweated, wondering whether the entity had deserted them. He looked at Uhura who was crouched by Spock holding a glass for him as he propped himself up on one elbow.

After a few sips the Vulcan waved her away. "Go and join Mr. Sulu. You were doing very well, but please be cautious."

She nodded and handed him the glass once he had settled himself more comfortably.

As she joined Sulu he whispered, "How is he?"

She shrugged. "I really don't know. I wish Dr. McCoy was with us."

"Me too," Sulu grimaced, "and Captain Kirk as well."

"As I surmise that they are the ordinary ones our host refers to you will no doubt be more successful without them, Lieutenants." The voice was little more than a whisper.

Sulu gave a quick worried grin over his shoulder. "Thank you, sir. I hope I don't prove you wrong."

Spock's eyes had closed again but he opened them for a brief moment. "You will not. Neither of you will," he added emphatically.

Both Sulu and Uhura felt the burst of pride those words caused. Spock was sparing of praise so his certainty that they would succeed bolstered their failing

courage.

"I asked if you have a name. It is so much easier to talk if we know to whom we are speaking," Sulu said encouragingly. At the continuing silence he looked back to Spock.

"Introduce yourselves, Mr. Sulu. Maybe our host will reciprocate."

Shrugging inwardly and feeling decidedly silly, Sulu grinned engagingly into thin air. "My name is Hikaru Sulu. I serve as Helmsman on board the USS Enterprise; she's the ship in orbit around your planet at the moment. This is Lieutenant Nyota Uhura; she's the ship's Communications Officer." He indicated Uhura as he spoke and then deliberately turned round. He swallowed hard as he took in the Vulcan's waxy pallor and wondered if they were going to be in time. *Please, oh please*, he thought. "This is Commander Spock. He's the First Officer and Science Officer of our ship. He's different from the rest of us; he comes from the planet Vulcan but he's very important to us all the same." For some reason he turned back to the blank wall in front of him. "Surely you can see he's ill? He needs help badly and we don't know what to do."

He risked another glance over his shoulder. Spock had slumped slightly and Sulu had no idea whether it was deliberate or if the Vulcan had indeed lost consciousness again.

"I used to be called Symphony by those that built me." The voice startled them. "You can use that name if you wish," it continued. "None of you are ordinary ones so why can you not help your companion?" This time the immediate impression the voice gave was of one willing to learn.

"Because Mr. Spock is a Vulcan and

they are very different from Terrans. He is the only Vulcan on board our ship and really only Doctor..."

"M'Benga," Uhura interrupted firmly.

"Yes, only Doctor M'Benga can help him," Sulu finished wondering what Uhura was going on about.

"This Doctor M'Benga - he is not an ordinary one, then?" Symphony questioned.

"No. Not in the least. He is a male belonging to my people," Uhura said proudly.

There was silence as Symphony thought. "Very well. I will fetch him."

"How are you going to do that?" Sulu asked curiously.

There was no answer and he turned to Uhura. "What are we going to do now?" he demanded.

"Wait," she said succinctly as she went back to Spock. The Vulcan was in fact deeply unconscious and she raised a alarmed face to Sulu. "I'm sorry I interrupted but I suddenly thought Symphony might be more sympathetic to someone like us. I hope I was right."

Sulu said, "Like us?" It was obvious he had not made the same connection that Uhura had. "And why does she call the others 'ordinary ones?' And just how does she speak Standard?"

"I'm not really sure, but we three were the only non-Caucasians on those landing parties. I just wondered whether the original inhabitants were similar to them. If that was so then she's probably never seen anything like us. I don't understand why she thinks we were

prisoners though. You'll need to ask her about the language but I think she may have been listening in to us ever since we assumed orbit."

Sulu nodded. "That fits, I guess. Let's hope she hurries up. I don't like the look of him." He sat down next to her. "I wonder what happened to the native population? Do you think she might tell us? And why am I calling her she?"

Uhura laughed slightly. "Unless we can get out of here it won't matter what she tells us. I'm bothered about the fact that she sounds rather hostile to her makers. I hope she won't extend that to the rest of the crew. And I don't know, but she sounds female."

They sat deep in thought for a moment then Sulu whispered, "Do you think she had anything to do with the disappearance of the natives?"

Uhura looked at him solemnly. "Cross your fingers and hope for the best, Mr. Sulu."

He returned her look. "I suggest we both should, Lieutenant."

There was a heartbeat's silence as the message faded into the stillness that was the Bridge. Everyone stared towards the Captain, who continued to gaze grim-faced at the viewscreen and ignore them all.

"Did I hear that right?" Scott asked finally. "Did something just demand that we send M'Benga down to yon planet?"

"That's what I heard, sir," Maggie Palmer agreed quietly.

"Whit are ye goin' to do, Cap'n?" Scott demanded of the still oblivious

Captain.

Kirk drew his attention away from his thoughts and looked straight at Scott. "Do as it asks. That is, as long as Doctor M'Benga agrees."

"Ye cannae do that, sir," Scott expostulated; then as Kirk turned his gimlet glare on him added, "Guid knows whit might be lurkin' doon there."

"You heard that message as clearly as the rest of us, I trust, Mr. Scott?" Kirk said mildly. "One of the three hostages needs medical attention, so I suggest that instead of arguing with me you put your mind to the question as to why it asked for M'Benga and not McCoy." He stood up briskly. "You have the con, Mr. Scott. See what you can find out about anything calling itself Symphony. I'll be in Sickbay."

"Aye, aye, sir," the subdued Engineer said to the retreating back.

Five minutes later Kirk was facing another angry officer. "I'm not asking you, McCoy. I'm telling you," he said more calmly than he felt. "The only one to go down is M'Benga, and then only if he agrees to do so."

"Jim, it could be a trap," McCoy exploded.

"Of course it could be. The whole blasted planet's a trap, Doctor. That's why I'm not ordering him to go. However I also think it might be slightly less of a trap for someone who isn't white," he finished thoughtfully.

McCoy sat and stared blankly at him. "What?" he asked weakly.

"Look at the names, Bones," the Captain urged. "Sulu, Uhura, even Spock. And then think of who else was

on those landing parties." He watched as understanding dawned on McCoy's face. "Quite," he said. "I'd been thinking about what you'd said about things they had in common and I wasn't getting anywhere. It was only when it asked for M'Benga by name and insisted on it being him that the penny dropped. Though I'd give my eye-teeth to know why a computer should subscribe to racial prejudice."

McCoy did not bother to argue but reached for the intercom. "I'll get Thau in, Jim," he said. He paused in the act. "If this thing is prejudiced against us, I don't understand why it's keeping the others hostage? I'd have thought it would have rather got rid of us." He looked closely at Kirk, who had slumped back in his chair, saw the minute signs of strain and sighed, "I'm sorry for losing my temper, Jim."

The Captain summoned a smile. "We're all on edge, Bones." Kirk waited until McCoy had put the call through before saying thoughtfully, "I've no idea of the answer to your question but I don't think this is a hostage situation." He forestalled McCoy's interruption by saying, "After all the only communication we've had from whatever it is is one to request medical assistance. Does that sound like it's holding them as hostages?"

McCoy pursed his lips. "I guess not; but what is it doing, then?"

"That's just one of many things we need answers to, Bones. I've got Scotty working on a complete run-down of information on this 'Symphony'. Not," he added gloomily, "that I expect they'll find anything. Spock..." he bit his lip, "Spock did say the only other records for this area are extremely old." He got up and paced across the office floor, watched by an alert McCoy. "Even if M'Benga is willing to go we still have the problem of how to get them back. Could he take transponders for the other three?"

"Sure, that'll be easy enough, although it won't be much use if we can't keep a fix on them."

Kirk had just turned to answer him when they were interrupted by a deep voice from the doorway. "You were looking for me, Len?" it asked.

"Come on in, Thau." McCoy waved in Kirk's direction. "It's actually the Captain who wants to see you."

"Sit down, M'Benga," Kirk said rather absently. He waited for the other man to settle himself and then said quietly, "We have just received a message from the planet. It came from something calling itself Symphony, and asked for a doctor." He looked at M'Benga. "Specifically you, Doctor M'Benga."

M'Benga blinked but said nothing, just waited for whatever Kirk had to say next. "We have been given no information as to why it needs a doctor." The Captain rubbed his chin. "There's also no option for you to take a companion, and I'm not sure that I would allow it anyway. There are enough of us already down there. It doesn't need any more, dammit!" He stopped abruptly. "Sorry. Will you go?" he asked simply.

"It asked for me by name?" Kirk nodded in answer. "And didn't say why?" M'Benga looked thoughtful. "Can we ask it why?"

"We can try." Kirk crossed to the intercom and asked Palmer to open hailing frequencies.

They waited quietly for the few seconds it took her then Kirk indicated the intercom and said, "It's all yours, Doctor."

Both doctors looked amazed but M'Benga leaned forward and, a little ill-

at-ease, said clearly, "Symphony, this is Doctor M'Benga. Can you hear me?" After a few seconds he tried again. "Symphony? What is it you need me for?"

"I hear you, Dr. M'Benga. One of my guests is unwell."

Kirk and McCoy, out of visual range of the unit, raised their eyebrows at the use of the word guest. "The other two say he needs medical attention and that they cannot help him in any way. Lt. Uhura says that you must come, Doctor."

Behind him M'Benga heard both Kirk's indrawn breath and McCoy's mutter of, "Spock. It's got to be Spock." Not for the first time the African wondered how the Vulcan had ever been accepted for Starfleet. He did not know about McCoy, but he always approached an ill or injured Spock with his heart in his mouth. Quickly he pushed the thought away and said, "I will need a few moments to collect my kit. Do you have any idea what is wrong with him?"

"No," Symphony said baldly.

"Very well. Then I must tell you that I may need to request help from my colleagues on the ship, and that I will accept no refusal of any such request." M'Benga's tone was unexpectedly firm.

There was a long pause before Symphony said, "We are waiting for your arrival, Doctor."

"I'm on my way, Symphony."

He turned back to Kirk and McCoy. "It could still be Sulu, you know."

"Sure," McCoy grunted, "and I notice that you didn't ask!" He handed him a medi-kit. "I've put transponders in there for the other three. Hold your arm

out."

"If I've any problems, Len, I'll be calling on you, so be ready," M'Benga said as he watched McCoy skilfully insert the tiny transponder.

"Just get that green-blooded..." McCoy caught Kirk's glare. "Just get Spock back up here as soon as possible," he finished somewhat lamely.

"Dr. M'Benga." By contrast Kirk was totally professional. "Symphony may have a prejudice against anyone with a white skin."

"Racial prejudice, Captain?" There was disbelief in the deep voice.

"It's only a guess, Doctor, and if we're correct we don't have a clue as to its origins," Kirk warned grimly.

M'Benga looked at him, thought about this man's record, and of the crew members still on the planet surface. "I'll bear it in mind, sir," he said.

"That's all I can ask." Kirk smiled disarmingly. "Well, let's get this show on the road, shall we, Doctors?" The Captain's relief showed in the lightening of his voice.

After Scott had set him down at the coordinates that Symphony had supplied M'Benga looked round him. All he could see were ruins and his lips tightened as he wondered if this was all someone's idea of a joke. Well if so, he certainly did not find it funny. Suddenly he felt the unmistakable tickle of a transporter beam and back on the ship Scott suppressed a curse.

"I've lost him, sir," he announced.

"No more than I expected, Scotty." Kirk did not seem overly concerned.

McCoy started to bluster but was stopped by his Captain's next words.

"That's enough, Doctor. If you can't add anything concrete to this discussion then don't say anything." Turning his attention to the wary Scott, Kirk continued, "I have every faith in the four officers being held on that planet." As he spoke he walked to the transporter room door and was gone.

Scott and McCoy stood and looked at each other in consternation.

"Aye, and faith is all we've got unless I can trace M'Benga," Scott said softly.

McCoy raised his eyebrows. "No luck with that library search?"

Scott snorted in disgust. "Not so far, and I'm no' banking on it even if the Cap'n is."

McCoy frowned. "You know he always takes losing people hard but Sulu, Uhura, M'Benga all at once..." He trailed off.

"Dinnae forget Mr. Spock, Doctor," Scott said, slightly confused.

"I wasn't forgetting Spock, Scotty. How could any of us do that?" McCoy shook his head wearily. "I was gonna say that could be nearly a big a blow as losing Spock on his own, and putting them all together?" He sighed. "I'm for the Bridge, Scotty. See if moral support can do any good."

"Aye. Well I'll gang wi' ye. I can work as well up there as here."

Thau M'Benga sighed with relief as the second transporter beam released him. Quickly he looked around. "Sulu, Uhura, thank heavens. Are you both okay?" he asked.

"We're fine, Thau. It's Mr. Spock who needs you." Uhura answered for both of them from her kneeling position next to the Vulcan.

M'Benga had already unslung his medi-kit and was halfway across the room. "Could we have some light in here," he demanded, then blinked in surprise as the room lightened immediately. "Not too much," he barked as he held the machine over Spock. "Has he been conscious at all?" he asked.

"Now and again, but not for long and he seemed in pain," Sulu answered him. "Will he be all right?"

"I don't even know what's wrong with him yet," M'Benga grunted in answer as he frowned over the readings he was getting. "What on earth?" he muttered and reached for his communicator.

"That will not work, Doctor M'Benga." The soft, silvery voice of Symphony filled the room.

"Well it better had," he snapped. "We had a bargain and I'm going to need that help." He looked up. "I need proper facilities and another trained doctor, and unless you can provide me with them they're all back on the Enterprise."

After another short silence he said accusingly, "Just what have you done to him?" Not waiting for an answer he spoke to Sulu and Uhura. "What happened to you two?"

"Nothing since we woke up in here. Before that neither of us can remember

anything. We don't even know how long we've been here," Sulu answered him.

"Twenty-four hours or thereabouts." M'Benga frowned at his tricorder. "Uhura, can you move away from Spock for a moment?"

Puzzled, she did as requested, and he followed her. Rapidly adjusting his medi-kit for Terran readings he passed it over her. "Sulu, you as well, please." After he had finished he pulled a slight face but only said, "Are you both sure you feel all right?"

"We both felt a bit odd to begin with but we're fine now," Uhura replied.

"Count yourselves extremely lucky. We must be so similar to the native race that her little adjustments are no problem." He moved back to his patient. "Spock, however, was not so lucky. It's changed his whole blood composition." Suddenly impatient he snapped, "Symphony, make up your mind, will you! I need to get Spock some treatment or he's not going to live to keep anyone company."

Both Uhura and Sulu looked at him, horrified, and they all waited tensely for Symphony's answer.

"I did not intend to do harm. There were parameters that were not the norm; they had to be corrected." The voice sounded slightly defiant.

Wearily M'Benga nodded. "I don't really suppose you did, Symphony, but that doesn't change matters. Spock still needs urgent medical treatment and I still need help."

"Very well, Doctor. One moment." The alien transporter effect engulfed them as Symphony spoke.

They all materialised in an large well-equipped lab. Without looking round him M'Benga knelt next to Spock. "The ship, Symphony, the ship. Not some medical lab I don't know my way round."

"This will have to do. I cannot let any of you fall into the hands of the ordinary ones again. Ask for what you need and I will provide it."

"Doctor McCoy for one; three litres of Vulcan T-Negative blood and some transfusion equipment - and hurry them up, Symphony." He beckoned to Sulu and Uhura and whispered, "What does she mean by the ordinary ones?"

"We think she means the Caucasians," Sulu whispered.

"Really? The Captain said something about that but I didn't believe him. What's happening? I'm going to lose him if it doesn't get a move on." He stood up and began restlessly moving round the lab.

"Uhura, Sulu, come over here, will you. See that equipment? Can you get it out and I'll tell you how to set it up."

"We've set up portable transfusion units before, Thau. This doesn't look to be all that different. Leave it with us and if we get into trouble we'll give you a yell," Uhura said softly. "You go and keep an eye on Spock; and don't worry, I think you'll get what you asked for. She's not evil; she just thought we were prisoners and if she freed us maybe we'd stay with her. I think she's lonely."

"Maybe so, Uhura, but it's got a hell of a lot to learn." M'Benga was not to be mollified. "You just can't go mucking around with people like this."

the sound of a transporter beam and the appearance of a red-faced McCoy complete with a stasis unit containing the blood and some other bits of equipment. It was obvious to the anxiously waiting three that McCoy was furious.

"Let me see," McCoy said curtly and shouldered past them. "Sorry," he said in passing, "Good to see you're both all right. What has this pointed-eared idiot been doing to himself now? Three litres, Thau? Not even Spock could possibly need all that at once." The monologue ceased as he deciphered the readings on his medi-kit. "My god," he whispered, "I hope we'll be in time."

Once more the complete professional he stood up and looked round. "You've got transfusion equipment? Good. Bring it over here, will you. I don't want to move Spock if I don't have to. What can we use...? Oh that's fine, it's got a collector on it. Thau, I brought a mini-sterilisation field with me. Let's get him sedated and the changeover started."

Suddenly he stepped back and said quietly. "I'll stay back just in case."

"No. That's playing to her misconceptions," M'Benga jumped in quickly. "I need you, Leonard. I may be the Vulcan specialist but you're the one who majored in Spock."

"You sure?" McCoy sounded rather tentative.

"I'm sure. Get on with it, Doctor." M'Benga smiled and pushed McCoy back towards the Vulcan.

"Right. Pass me that hypo, Thau. That field set up yet, Sulu? I'd be grateful if you would assist me, Dr. M'Benga."

A tense five minutes was ended by

Sulu and Uhura moved back and

watched as the two doctors switched on the field and started their task. Suddenly, McCoy looked over his shoulder.

"Damn, I almost forgot. The Captain wants you two to talk to Symphony; see what this is all about and find out if we can help."

Uhura laughed slightly. Both she and Sulu felt slightly light-headed now that Spock was nearly safe. "Sure," she said. "I'm not a communications expert for nothing, Doctor."

"On you go then; and see if it'll let you contact the ship and tell them we're all right. This is going to take time and we might have a bit of remedial work to do but he's safe now." *I hope*, he added silently to himself as he looked at his grim-faced colleague, but there really was no need to worry the youngsters any more than they were already.

Sulu and Uhura walked across to the far side of the room and sat down.

"Symphony," Sulu called. "Can we talk to you?"

"Do you really wish to?" The silvery voice sounded lost and lonely. "I really did not mean to damage him."

"We know that, and you've helped save him by getting Doctor McCoy down here. Look," Uhura said quietly, "we'll disturb them if we stay here. Is there anywhere we can send a message to the ship? Then we can have a long talk."

There was a pause while Symphony thought about Uhura's words. "You do not wish to return to your ship immediately?"

"No, not just yet. Our Captain wishes us to find out if we can help you," Sulu said.

"Help me?" There was surprise in the soft voice. "Why would you want to help me when I have harmed one of you?"

"You didn't intend to hurt any of us, Symphony." The compassion in Sulu's voice was enough to make the decision for Symphony.

"Then please go out of the door before you. At the other end of the corridor is the library. There you will find the history of this planet until they left me alone. Your communication devices will be there; I will de-activate the force field to enable you to speak with your ship." There was a short hiatus and Sulu thought she had finished speaking, but Uhura stopped him from leaving. "You won't let them turn me off, will you?" Symphony asked anxiously.

"No, no. We won't let them do that. In fact I think you might miss your solitude before too long, Symphony," Uhura laughed.

With one last glance at the tableau on the other side of the room, Uhura and Sulu left the lab and headed for the library.

When they reached the room Symphony had called the library both of the Terrans stopped and gasped in astonishment.

"Symphony, this is absolutely incredible. All these books, and they're in beautiful condition. Both the Captain and Mr. Spock would love this room."

"Yes, I kept them like that in case my makers ever came back; but they did not care about them or me," the voice said sadly. "Your devices are on the table nearest the door."

They exchanged glances then entered the room. Sulu picked up his communicator and called the ship. Uhura proceeded to wander around the library examining everything until she came to a small alcove.

She sat down and said firmly, "Symphony, why not tell me about the ordinary ones?" While she waited for an answer she heard Sulu talking to the ship and she looked round curiously. *I wonder whereabouts we are?*

Obviously the room held some significance to Symphony that did not apply to the rest of the settlement for it was completely undamaged with no sign of deterioration of any kind. It had windows, and the sun was streaming through them. By the angle it was late afternoon and she idly wondered how the books were protected. She dismissed the thought. There would be time for all this later but for now she must concentrate on Symphony.

"Uhura?" Sulu said quietly and she jumped.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to startle you."

"I must have drifted off while I was waiting for Symphony to start talking," she said, surprised. "You know, I'm really tired and hungry and a shower would be wonderful."

He grinned at her. "Yep. I'm in complete agreement with you. Anyway, the Captain suggests we see if Symphony can provide us with somewhere to sleep and eat. The ship will send us down bedding and food if we need them."

In answer to her startled look he said, "He didn't exactly say so but I think he's not sure what Symphony is capable of doing and it seems it'll be a while yet

before Spock can be moved. I think he doesn't want to risk anyone else down here for the moment."

"Symphony is totally incapable of deliberately harming anyone. I'm sure about that," Uhura said stoutly.

"She harmed Spock," Sulu reminded her.

"Not on purpose and when she found out what she'd done she pretty quickly got help for him." Uhura was indignant.

Sulu waved her back onto the seat. "I know. I just wanted to be sure you were aware of the dangers. Anyway, while you were asleep I asked about food and beds. She says we would probably be best to eat our own food but she can provide anything else. I'm sure that will include a bath," he said wickedly.

Uhura frowned at him then laughed. "Okay, you see to the food. Enough for four, I expect, and I'll see if I can find a bathroom. Have you been back to the lab?" she asked, suddenly fearful.

"Yes. Everything's going fine, according to M'Benga. McCoy's version was unrepeatable," he laughed. "You know, we're going to have our work cut out for us if Symphony won't accept the ordinary ones." He laughed again. "I wish I could have seen Kirk's face at hearing himself described as ordinary."

Uhura joined in. "I don't think it will much of a problem once she realises we are them. I think she's just very, very lonely. Can you imagine what it must have been like for her all this time? By herself, abandoned? Wouldn't you have got a little paranoid? Thought that somebody was persecuting you?"

She was warming to her theme when Sulu said, "Pax, Uhura, pax. I'm not the enemy, you know. Let's get all the information we need then we can produce a viable plan that the Captain will agree to. It may well be possible for us to leave a survey party here - that is, of course, if Symphony wants us to - and they'll be able to keep her company until someone more qualified can get here. I don't think Captain Kirk has any intention of abandoning her, you know. If he did then I doubt he'd be asking us to find out what she needs. Also, if we can find out what happened to the original inhabitants then we may be able to find their descendants, if there are any. At the very least we will be able to provide her with a choice of colonists. If that is what she wants," he finished.

"You're right. I'm sorry, Sulu." She smiled warmly at him and he gave her a quick hug.

An hour later, clean and fed, Uhura put her head round the lab door. Both doctors were standing watching the emerald blood drain from the bag into their patient. It was M'Benga who noticed her presence and beckoned her in.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Yes. We've been in contact with the ship again and there's food waiting for you as well as a bath if you want one."

His eyes lit up. "Great. I'll go first as Len's not going to be prised away from Spock just yet."

"I'll stay and keep him company," she murmured. "If you go along the corridor right to the end, Sulu's in the last room on the right and he'll show you the facilities. Standard ship fare, I'm afraid, but Symphony's really only sure of the

water here. Once we get everything checked out we may be able to use her stores, but for the moment she'd rather we didn't. Not after what she did to him." She nodded at the recumbent form on the floor.

"Sure," he said and exchanged places with her. After a second's hesitation Uhura went forward to join McCoy.

"So it's decided it's not a god after all, has it?" his acerbic voice questioned.

"Doctor McCoy!" Uhura was shocked. "I'm sure that's the last thing she thought she was."

"You may be right, Nyota, but in my experience all these damn-blasted sentient computers we come across all think they're god."

McCoy was in no mood for explanations so Uhura contented herself with, "Both Sulu and I think she was just trying to help. She only had the planet norm to compare him with. She thought he was ill or something and tried to do what she could about it."

"And nearly killed him doing so." McCoy was not to be placated.

"Well she soon put that right, didn't she?" Uhura flared.

"It never should have happened, Uhura. There should have been no need for it to have anything to put right." McCoy turned to her. Even in the dim light she could tell just how tired he was and her anger faded as quickly as it had arisen.

"I'm sorry, Doctor," she said quietly. "I sometimes forget how much he means to you."

McCoy did not bother to question her assumption. "It's okay, Nyota." His voice firming he continued, "Did I hear you mention food."

"You did. Can I get you anything?"

"Coffee and a sandwich will do fine," he said absently. All his attention was back on Spock and he never noticed her leave.

Somewhere during the early hours of the morning McCoy and M'Benga announced themselves satisfied with the Vulcan's condition.

"He should be able to do the rest himself," M'Benga said cheerfully.

"I'd like him back up in Sickbay, though," McCoy said thoughtfully.

"He can be moved easily enough," M'Benga said as they busied themselves with taking down the complicated apparatus.

"If this excuse..." McCoy swallowed the rest of his comment as M'Benga frowned at him. "If the computer will let us beam him up, that is," he finished.

"You can always ask her, Len." The African Doctor was busy packing up but he looked up. "She does have a name, you know. It wouldn't harm anyone for you to use it, surely?"

McCoy glared in the direction of his back. "Huh," he muttered unconvinced. "Why don't you ask it as you're on first name terms? And why keep talking about it as though it's female?"

"Because," the other said patiently, "you're in charge and it's therefore up to you to deal with Symphony. As to your

other question, you've heard her talk. What else would you say she was?"

McCoy rubbed his chin. "Damn." He looked round him. "How to I get to speak with it, I mean, her, then?"

M'Benga raised his brows. "Ask. I think she's capable of monitoring all areas."

McCoy swallowed as he thought of his exchange with Uhura earlier that night.

"Don't worry, Len," M'Benga teased. "I have it on good authority that she doesn't eavesdrop. It isn't polite."

"Very funny, Thau," McCoy grumbled. He tugged his tunic and said loudly, "This is Dr. McCoy, Symphony. Can I ask you a few questions?"

M'Benga blinked in surprise but he sat down ready to listen.

Symphony took a little while to answer and both men thought they could hear apprehension in the voice. "How may I serve you, Dr. McCoy?"

"Serve me?" McCoy was distinctly puzzled. "I just want a few questions answered, that's all. Nothing more, nothing less. Okay?"

"Very well, Dr. McCoy. Please ask your questions and I will endeavour to supply your answers."

"I just want to know if it's okay to move Spock back up to the ship. You won't hold the rest of them hostage again, will you?"

"I never intended a hostage situation, Dr. McCoy. I was attempting to hid them from those I mistakenly believed to be their captors."

McCoy shook his head. "Well, whatever. So you won't stop me, then?"

"No, of course not, sir. I cannot stop you from doing anything you want to do."

"What?" McCoy was totally perplexed. "I'm not sure I understand you, Symphony. How come you held us all prisoners then?"

"You only needed to ask and I would have let you go. At first, I did not realise that you thought otherwise. I did not understand why my makers did not understand how I worked."

"We're not your makers, Symphony," McCoy spluttered.

"So Uhura and Sulu have explained. I have now examined your anatomy and physiology and I realise that you are indeed not those who made me. I also realise that Uhura, Sulu and M'Benga are the same as you but that Commander Spock is very different."

"Well that's a good start, I suppose." McCoy shook his head and then grinned. "You and Spock should get along very well, indeed." He stooped and picked up his communicator. "Now if you will excuse me, ma'am, I have a patient to deliver to Sickbay and a report to make to the Captain."

"Dr. McCoy?"

He stopped and cocked his head. "Yes, Symphony?"

"When Commander Spock has recovered, I should like to hold a conversation with him. It will be fascinating to speak with one so very different from anyone else I have known."

McCoy grinned and behind him

M'Benga had difficulty in restraining his laughter. "Of course, Symphony. I think Spock will want to spend a lot of time with you as well." As an after-thought he said, "When I let him out of Sickbay, that is."

As McCoy and Spock dematerialised M'Benga stood up. He looked around him and, satisfied that everything was tidy, said, "I have a couple of hours before I'm due back on duty, Symphony. Do you want to finish that discussion we were having?"

"Yes, please, Thau. I think Uhura and Sulu are nearly finished their exploration of this building. Do you wish to join them?"

"Good idea, Symphony. Four heads are definitely better than one."

"I agree. I find these exchanges most refreshing. I look forward to more if your Captain will allow them." For a moment she sounded unsure again and M'Benga found himself saying loudly,

"Oh, Captain Kirk's a sucker for ladies in distress. You'll have no problem getting him to agree especially now he's got Spock back safe and sound."

Two days later a recovered but still pale Commander Spock was sitting up in bed in Sickbay listening blank-faced to a grinning McCoy.

"Can't trust you to do anything by yourself, can I, Spock?" The Doctor chortled.

"As I do not recall either being by myself for any length of time or you having anything to do with my work, I must admit to not understanding your comment, Doctor."

McCoy looked at him sharply, wishing, as always, that he could read this man as well as Jim Kirk seemed to be able to do.

"However it is not my intention to denigrate the work of either Dr. M'Benga or yourself, McCoy. It was..." he searched for the exact word he wished to use, then glancing at the Terran's face, said simply, "...fortunate that both of you were available to employ your medical expertise on my behalf." He inclined his head in McCoy's direction.

"Uh... Well, I guess it's all in a day's work, Spock. Anyway, I wouldn't want to lose my sparring partner or Jim's chess opponent, now would I?" McCoy found himself saying words he normally would have kept to himself, and it was with a degree of relief that he saw Kirk enter the ward.

"Over here, Jim," he called, somewhat unnecessarily as Spock was in the same bed he had been in since they had beamed him back up to the ship minutes after they had finished the transfusion. Even now McCoy could feel the relief that had poured through him as they had materialised safely on board the Enterprise.

"Hi, Spock, Bones." Kirk greeted them cheerfully, totally oblivious to the slightly emotional atmosphere surrounding his two friends. "Spock, you're looking a lot better. When are you going to let him out of here, Doctor?"

"We were just about to discuss that, Captain," Spock said gravely.

"We were?" It certainly had not been McCoy's intention but he knew better than to argue. "Well, I guess another couple of days should see him quite fit enough to return to his quarters."

Spock looked sharply at him but it was Kirk who said, "Two days is a long time, Bones. I was rather wanting Spock to check on the party we're leaving behind and the information that has been down-loaded into our memory banks by Symphony. Also," he said slyly, "Symphony would like to talk to Mr. Spock. I think she wants to apologise."

The Vulcan looked totally unruffled. "I too would wish to speak with Symphony before we leave, Captain. I believe she would make a most interesting conversationalist."

"Well, that puts us in our place. Doesn't it, Bones?" Kirk cried dramatically.

Spock regarded him indulgently. "You know perfectly well what I mean, Captain," he said softly.

Kirk grinned down at him. "I know, Mr. Spock, but you will need to forgive my Human emotionalism." He switched his smile to McCoy, who grinned back.

"No need to try your wiles on me, Captain. I'm totally immune to them after all these years." He turned to the patiently waiting Spock. "I don't suppose he'll come to any harm in Uhura's tender care."

Kirk and Spock both looked at him blankly. McCoy shrugged.

"Uhura and Symphony seem to get on like a house on fire. And as far as I know what little time Uhura doesn't spend down on that planet is spent asking how Mr. Spock is. So either way it seems to me that she'll be around to take care of him, and that means he'll be a whole lot safer than if he's gallivanting around after you, Jim."

McCoy watched Spock's greenening

expression with interest and ignored the little-boy look on Kirk's face. After a stony silence he continued, "You can go in the morning, Spock, as long as you agree to adhere to any restrictions I place on your activities."

The Vulcan looked up from the bed-cover he was perusing. "Thank you, Doctor. If you inform me of your restrictions I shall attempt to comply with them."

"Good. Well I'll leave you two to it. I'm sure Spock can check survey parties and such-like from here without any difficulty, Jim. Don't tire him out, though, or he won't be leaving Sickbay tomorrow."

After McCoy left Kirk sat down next to the bed. "I'm sure he does it on purpose, you know."

"Indeed. I often think it is because he has difficulty in expressing his emotions in any other way." He glanced up and caught Kirk's surprised look. "Do not think that because I control my emotions that I am unaware of them in others, Jim."

Kirk nodded. "I know. It was you speaking about them so openly that surprised me."

Spock elevated an eyebrow. "Openly, Captain? Surely you did not think I was referring to myself? If so, you are mistaken. I was merely commenting on Doctor McCoy's rather peculiar way of expressing his."

Kirk started to laugh helplessly while Spock watched with an answering gleam in his eye.



MOSS BENEATH A STONE

The world, from moss beneath a stone,
is dark and damp and gloomy.
From ocean bed, the world is green
and cold and dimly moving.
The world from the clouds is patchy,
and from the fields is grass.
From city street the world is grey,
and hard and cold and loveless.

But the world from here is a limitless pearl
And, as usual, I'm glad to be back.

Alan Boag



HOLY ORDERS

by

David Gallagher

The Starship Enterprise sliced majestically through space. Seen from the surface of a planet she appeared as a moving point of light - a shooting star, perhaps? The Enterprise, at present, was under holy orders. They were returning a small group of religious dignitaries from a meeting with Starfleet Command to their monastic existence on their home planet Arn Droo.

Arn Droo was a desolate planet - more of a ball of rock - on which the Sisterhood had chosen to base their order. Because it was such a desolate place and far off the beaten track, well away from the usual trade shipping lanes, it was an ideal place for a religious retreat. The Sisterhood relished the hardship and denied themselves many things. One of their strictest rules, as in so many religious orders, was their vow of celibacy.

They were often nicknamed the Sisters of Mercy because as often as not, whenever a disaster struck anywhere in the galaxy, a group of the Sisterhood would appear to help with the relief effort. For this they asked no payment - they just quietly preached their beliefs while they worked, such was their devotion. They were often affectionately known as the Arn Droo Sisters - and there were never such devoted sisters.

While travelling aboard the Enterprise they had been offered every comfort, all of which they refused. Instead they requested the use of the ship's chapel, which they were granted. They had then promptly closeted themselves in, and none of the crew had

seen them since. It was noticed that they were not eating, but whether that was because they were fasting, or because they didn't like the food replicators, nobody knew.

And so it was with some surprise that as Captain James T Kirk was on his way down to Sickbay to speak with Dr McCoy he literally bumped into one of the Sisterhood.

He was just approaching the Sickbay doors when they whooshed open and one of the Sisters ran out, and charged straight into Kirk. She hadn't seen him for the tears streaming down her face. By the time Kirk had picked himself up and thought about comforting the distraught woman, she had already disappeared into the nearest turbolift.

Curious as to what was going on on his ship, he entered Sickbay to find Dr McCoy sitting at his desk.

"Bones, what's going on?" he asked urgently. "I just bumped into one of the Sisterhood in the corridor, and she was damn near hysterical."

McCoy sat back and drawled casually, "Oh, that. It's nothing to worry about, Jim. I just told her she was pregnant."

"What? Pregnant? And is she?" Kirk asked in amazement.

"Well, no," replied the Doctor, "but it sure as hell cured her hiccups!"



THE TIME OF THE RAINS

by

Linda A Carter

Amanda Grayson dug her hands down into the soil, lifting and briefly stirring it. Some of the soil had become hard and dry, even here in the greenhouse, with so little water to nurture it now that the re-cycling pump had broken down. Sarek had promised to fix it, but lately he had so many diplomatic meetings that she knew he would be hard-pressed to find the time for fixing the pump. *Maybe I could have a try at fixing it myself*, she thought, but it was a long and arduous task that she didn't really care to do.

Never mind, she thought; perhaps she could find some willing helper from the Academy. Recently she and Sarek had discussed hiring a housekeeper, as the two of them were ordinarily far too busy with either diplomatic missions or Amanda's teaching schedule at the Academy to keep their home in Shi-Kahr looking the way it really should, and students at the Academy were often looking for part time work. Amanda had assured Sarek that it was the logical answer. He had agreed, and said that he would put a notice on the Academy bulletin board at the earliest opportunity. She smiled at her thoughts and went back to loosening up the soil.

Taking a small spade she began turning the soil in one of the flower pots too. There were actually no flowers in the pot; flowers didn't last very long here in Vulcan's harsh climate. Amanda didn't buy them for that reason.

Finished with turning the soil at last, she stood straight to relieve her aching back and glanced idly around the greenhouse. In one of the troughs below

the work-bench, she noticed that the mushrooms were growing just fine. They would soon be ready for picking. Further down the table, the tomato vines needed just a little tying up and in a corner they grew beansprouts and lettuce for salads. There was some watercress and a little red cabbage too, but it was one of the nearer plant-boxes that Amanda made for, eagerly inspecting the newest arrival to the greenhouse; strawberry seedlings.

When the re-cycling pump had broken down she had been worried that the strawberry seedlings might die, but they had actually grown quite well and now a number of them were ready for picking. Amanda couldn't resist plucking one and popping it into her mouth - ooh, delicious. It was the first time in long years that Amanda had tasted a strawberry, and she knew that Sarek had never tasted them in his life. Now she could make him strawberry desserts.

Wiping her soily hands on her coverall, she slipped the dirty garment off and hung it in its usual place on the back of the greenhouse door before stepping outside.

The heat hit her like that from a blast-furnace. It was high summer on Vulcan, and despite all her years on this planet Amanda had never really got used to the terrific heat of Vulcan summer. In another few days, however, she knew the heat would break and then the rains would come to breathe new life into the land, bringing desert plants to bloom, crops to life. Amanda was looking forward to it.

Raising one hand to her face, she

wiped away the perspiration that had formed on her brow in her short walk from the greenhouse to Sarek's rock garden. It was cooler in the house, but Amanda felt disinclined to go in just yet. Vulcan's violet, sunset sky was very beautiful at this time of day. Amanda always enjoyed the sunsets. There was very little cloud, of course, but the harsh red sierra of the lower horizon, merging into mauve, was captivating and now... yes, Amanda felt the tiniest of breezes faintly touch her skin. Later on it would become very cold, like all deserts the galaxy over.

She turned, strolling over to the garden wall where Sarek had set up a trellis work of trailing, wild red thorn brush. The Vulcan name for it was nui-kahshq, probably one of Vulcan's few free-growing, indigenous plants - if it could truly be called a plant. It was really more like a weed. On Earth it would have looked ugly; harsh, wild. red, scraggy stems which seemingly sprawled everywhere, but here in Sarek's rock garden it enhanced the setting, fitting in perfectly with its severe surroundings.

It was growing cooler now. Although the ground kept in the heat of the day for a few hours longer, the air quickly cooled. Amanda turned and walked to the opposite wall, enjoying this small time to herself, this short time of peace. Generally her days were so busy. It was nice to relax and enjoy the garden and the greenhouse for a time. Finding the stone seat where her husband often sat and meditated Amanda sat down, eyes automatically lifting to the sky.

Then she saw it.

High above in the sunset Vulcan sky, the wind-rider soared and dipped on Vulcan's almost non-existent breezes. Few Earthlings, or even Vulcans, had ever had more than a glimpse of this rare

creature. The wind-rider was so rare it was practically a myth. Amanda gasped, watching as the creature circled, and she realised that it would have been invisible had it not been for the lowering rays of distant sunlight catching on the underside of its wings.

When it turned, coming closer, she saw the transparent fur matting the line of the wind-rider's slender neck and the tissue thin skin, beneath which the creature's glass-like bone structure was revealed. It spiralled downwards, gliding effortlessly. What the wind-riders lived on was a mystery. Nobody had ever found out. All that the Vulcans knew of the creature was that it never landed anywhere; too fragile to bear anything but the air against its body, the wind-rider slept, ate, hunted and mated, all in mid-air.

Soaring on glassy, fragile wings, the creature turned once again, climbing, banking steeply upwards at an angle where it disappeared for a moment from view and Amanda shaded her eyes against the brilliant sunset, trying to see. It reappeared an instant later like some child's silver glider offset with sparkling patches of golden sunlight, a twinkling jewel in the sky. But now it was much further away, shrinking fast into the distance and then, finally, it was gone, vanished over the horizon.

Amanda sat breathless, filled with wonder, feeling privileged to have seen such a rare sight. It seemed a crime to move, to breathe a sound and thus disturb this marvellous moment, as though to do so would break the spell. But at last, softly, in sheer rapturous wonder, Amanda breathed a long, slow sigh of pure admiration. She moved then, ponderously straightening up, and the whisper of a footstep in the garden suddenly caught her ears.

"Amanda." His rich voice fell softly yet sonorously on the evening air, carrying to her ears the pleasant frisson it always brought with it. She turned towards her husband and smiled.

"Sarek." Her voice trembled a little; she realised she was almost on the edge of tears. "Oh Sarek, I saw a wind-rider!" she breathed.

"Indeed!" His tone registered a mild surprise and she glanced up at him, suddenly curious.

"Have you ever seen a wind-rider, Sarek?"

"Once only," he replied. "It was many years ago, during my kahs-wan."

"Oh Sarek, it was so beautiful, so delicate and tiny."

"Hardly tiny, my wife," he observed. "The creature's wingspan measures approximately one hundred point five centimetres."

"Well it looked tiny so high up." Amanda said, snuggling up to him with a cheeky grin.

"In Vulcan legend the wind-rider is supposed to bring extremely bad luck," Sarek told her, and she pouted then, hitting him on the shoulder with mock chagrin.

"Oh, don't!" Amanda pulled a face. "You rat! Now you've gone and spoiled it!" Then, sharply, she glanced archly up at him, only just realising what he had said. "Just a minute, I thought Vulcans didn't believe in luck."

"I did not say that modern Vulcans believed in luck," he specified, "but the wind-riders have been on Vulcan for centuries, since long before Surak's time.

However, luck is not exclusively a Human condition, my wife."

"Ah! You mean then that it does sometimes apply to Vulcans, my husband?"

"Perhaps," he nodded, looking warmly down on her, and Amanda knew he was teasing.

She squeezed him round the waist, uttering a mock threatening growl, "I'll get you for that later!"

"Later, my wife?" A tiny smile hovered on the edge of his mouth, and before Amanda knew what he was about he had quickly bent his head and kissed her briefly.

An electric shock of jarring pleasure smote Amanda, flipping her stomach upside down. All these years, she thought, all this time she had been married to the Vulcan Ambassador and he could still knock her for six like that. Yet it was that quixotic flaw in Sarek, when he occasionally did something so totally Human, which made her love him all the more.

She pressed closer to him, smiling roguishly. "Maybe we could forget dinner," she suggested.

"And have Spock and his friends think us impolite hosts?" Sarek urged.

Amanda groaned inwardly. She had forgotten that tonight her son was bringing Captain Kirk and Dr McCoy to the house as dinner guests. All at once, Amanda didn't really feel like having company.

"There are only three days left of Spock's shore leave, Amanda," he reminded her. "It is appropriate that we should return Captain Kirk's hospitality."

It was true that Kirk had, four days ago, treated them as dinner guests up on the Enterprise. Now it was due to Sarek and Amanda to return the favour.

She sighed wearily. "I know you're right," she said. Still, Amanda had so much wanted her husband to herself this evening. Alas, if it had to be, then it had to be.

James T. Kirk and his landing party said goodbye to Sarek and Amanda three days later at the teleportation station in Shi-Kahr. They had just spent a very pleasant three days with Spock's parents, relaxing and taking it easy. *It would have been even more pleasant, Kirk reminded himself, if that damn woman hadn't come along.*

Kirk had been hoping that just he, Spock and McCoy would have ample time with Sarek and his wife, but, much to his misery, Starfleet Operations Officer Gisa Varristaan had managed to invite herself along.

Gisa Varristaan was half Romulan, half something unpronounceable, Kirk had heard. Her role aboard the Enterprise was 'Observer', on detached assignment from Starfleet for six months, but she had told Kirk that her assignment might be extended if the circumstances warranted it.

What circumstances? Kirk wondered. Gisa Varristaan was long on giving orders, short on giving explanations. Scott called her 'The Ice Queen', but that wasn't really fair. Gisa wasn't cold or unfeeling. She did seem to have an almost Vulcanoid calm and a certain regal poise, but she certainly not coldly Vulcan. Kirk had seen humour and warmth in her. She was forceful, yes, but not pushy or bitchy like some other 'forceful'

women that he had known.

It wasn't anything that she did, either. Gisa was always unfailingly polite and sensitive to people's feelings. She was, however, a little aloof and occasionally condescending. She sometimes had the annoying habit of making Kirk feel like a little boy playing at Ship's Captain, running around waving phasers when he really shouldn't have been. Kirk got the feeling that she had come to Vulcan just to annoy him, but that was ridiculous of course; Gisa and McCoy had become very friendly, and it was the Doctor who had invited her along.

All the same, Kirk thought, she did seem to walk around the Enterprise as if she owned the vessel. And her eyes, a cool silver-blue and teal, always appeared to be amused, *As if she's laughing at our pathetic efforts to be civilised*, Kirk thought.

This was the first time that he had ever seen anyone with dual-coloured eyes. It made him wonder what exactly her 'other half' was. He had very discreetly done some checking on Gisa Varristaan, only to discover that her credentials from Starfleet were superlative. She had commendations and citations from some of Starfleet's highest ranking notables. When he tried to dig deeper, however, he came up against a lot of 'File Closed' notices, and it ended up with Admiral Nogura telling him not to ask questions.

All of which made Kirk more curious than ever. The question now became, just who the hell was Gisa Varristaan? And aboard the Enterprise, because she was always nosing around somewhere new, the standard question from the Bridge crew became, "Where is she now?"

She irritated the life out of Kirk for

no reason that he could really put his finger on. Because of Gisa Varristaan, James Kirk had recently taken to chewing on his knuckles. She even had an adverse effect on Spock - and that was saying something. Sarek and Amanda, however, had found her delightful. *Oh well*, Kirk thought, *with luck Gisa's six month tour of observation will soon be up.*

Amanda straightened for a moment, massaging the back of her neck after being bent over her small portable computer. She wiped the perspiration from her forehead. Vulcan's summer heat still hadn't broken. There was still so much work to do on her students' written reports, and she had begun to wonder if she would ever finish. Sarek was absent, having had an urgent call from the Academy. Probably the 'urgent' meant that it was no more than what Amanda called diplomatic red-tape. She sighed with frustration, realising that she had just made an error on the computer.

"Oh... rats!" she cursed, furiously back-tracking to erase the error.

"Lady Amanda."

The voice, coming so suddenly, caused her to give a nervous start. She quickly glanced up from the computer screen. The man had entered so quietly she hadn't been aware of his approach.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in startled surprise.

"I'm sorry," he smiled.

Quite a young man, she noticed, very open-faced and somehow fresh-looking, like a healthy young farmer. Clear blue, guileless eyes looked at Amanda with candid interest.

"Uh... I was going to use the intercom," he said, "but the front door was already open."

Well, of course it was. Amanda and Sarek had no need to lock their house on Vulcan. There was a security forcefield which they could use in times of emergency, but it hadn't ever been operated since Sarek had bought the house.

"How can I help you?" Amanda asked, turning to face him. She didn't recognise him, he wasn't one of her students. With that great shock of blond hair, she would surely have known him otherwise. Then suddenly it struck her.

"Oh, have you come about the job?" she asked brightly.

"The job, yes, that's right," he nodded "I could use the extra money."

Amanda frowned. There was something a little odd about him, she thought.

"Are you one of Sarek's students?" she asked. "What's your name?"

"Jamie," he said, with what was meant to be a disarming smile. "My name is Jamie."

"Well, Jamie," she began, "I'm really not sure that you're precisely the right person for the job. Sarek and I were thinking more of..."

"Why not? What's wrong with me?" he demanded aggressively, and a warning clamour rang through Amanda's head.

Uh-oh, she thought. *Be careful here, Amanda!*

"There's nothing wrong with you,

Jamie," she said, slowly getting to her feet. "It's just that Sarek and I were thinking more of a woman. After all, you don't expect a man to apply for a job as a housekeeper, do you?" Logically, Amanda knew that the person's sex shouldn't make any difference. It was simply that she had hoped to have someone who could be a companion too. Another woman to talk to occasionally would have been nice, and would make a change from all the usual Vulcan faces.

"Oh, well... yeah. I guess you're right," Jamie answered. "But this is Vulcan, isn't it?" he grinned. "Everybody's equal."

"Yes. That's right, Jamie."

His thought-processes were like a child's, she thought, but that didn't disguise the fact that she felt danger from him. He had a hair-trigger temper, ready to go off at any moment, explode.

"So," Jamie's smile broadened, "now that I'm here, you can give me the job, can't you?"

"No, Jamie. I can't give you the job just like that. I have to know more about you," she explained. "What you're studying at the Academy, your full name, how old you are, things like that. I need... references, Jamie."

"References?"

"To tell me if you're a good worker, if you're conscientious and honest."

"Oh, well I can tell you that right here and now," he smiled again. "You only have to ask me."

"No, Jamie. That's not what I meant. References are something you get from other people. Somebody has to speak on your behalf, to say that you are

of good character."

"Like... Sarek, maybe?" he hazarded slyly, and suddenly Amanda felt that he was testing her in some way.

She hesitated, then said uncertainly, "Yes, like Sarek."

"NO!"

He slammed a fist down on the desk, breaking a delicate glass paperweight with a silk rose inside it. Sarek had bought it for her one Christmas on Earth. Now it lay in shards on the floor, the pink petals drooping, glass splinters everywhere.

"Oh gosh. I... I'm sorry," Jamie stared at the broken pieces in dismay. "I didn't mean for that... that..."

"It's all right, Jamie," she smiled, trying to make light of it. "No harm done." Even as she spoke, Amanda got the feeling that although he was sorry about the paperweight he wouldn't be sorry after he'd killed her. *Who is he?* she wondered, fighting down a rising sense of panic.

Jamie was frowning now, lower lip pulled down into a sulky pout of defiance. "No, no. That's no good," he mused aloud. "It won't... work. Sarek doesn't l-like me."

Oh, so he did know Sarek, did he? Amanda was down on her knees, picking up the pieces of broken glass.

"Careful!" Jamie warned, "You... you'll cut yourself."

Amanda winced. She had already cut herself and as she began to rise, Jamie bent down to help her up.

"You hurt yourself." He looked at

the blood on her finger, smiled again. "Nice," he said, "Red blood, not ...green." He took hold of her finger quite gently and put it to his mouth. "Old remedy," he said with a bashful grin. He sucked her finger, but did not immediately release her hand. "You're... nice, Amanda. I like you," he said slowly, wonderingly, as if only just realising it.

"Well I like you too, Jamie."

It was true. Much to her surprise, she did like him, the way you'd like a big, simple child. If only he didn't make her feel that he was more than just a mentally retarded adult; something much more dangerous.

"There are... other women at the Academy," he went on, "but they're... not like you, Amanda."

Uh-oh. what did she say to that? "That's very nice of you, Jamie." Gently but firmly she pulled her hand away from his and stood up. He stood too.

There were other women at the Academy, he had said, so he did work or maybe live there. What she couldn't understand was what somebody like him was doing there. He knew Sarek, by all accounts, but did Sarek know him, or was that simply some kind of ploy? There was so much Amanda didn't know, but she needed to know more if she was to survive.

"Jamie, what do you do at the Academy?" she asked.

A frown. "Don't like the Academy," he said.

End of subject. *Don't push it, Amanda.*

"But you... you must have friends there," she put in.

He didn't answer; he had turned to look out of the windows. "I like Vulcan, though," he told her suddenly. "Everybody is so... open. Trusting. Leaving their houses open that way. You know." He laughed, a sudden sharp, unpleasant sound. "You know, you can just walk in anywhere." Jamie giggled. "The Vulcans think they're so clever, but they're really not so smart. Not smart... like me." When he turned to face her Amanda saw his eyes, and they were no longer the eyes of a simple, child-like man.

They were the eyes of a murderer.

The Enterprise had been following the same route for hours, doing what was generally known as the routine 'milk run' from Vulcan to Rigel 3. Kirk sighed, looking up from the log. He closed it and handed it to Yeoman Chambers, then glanced idly around the Bridge. Chekov and Sulu were carrying on a quiet conversation about the latest V-Warp drive ships that Starfleet was experimenting with.

Kirk smiled as he heard Chekov exclaim, "But that iss not possible, Hikaru!" and the Captain's guess was that Sulu was pulling Chekov's leg again. Behind Kirk, Spock seemed thoroughly absorbed in his computer viewscreen. Everything was quiet. Boring, really, he thought.

"Mr Sulu, what's our E.T.A. for Rigel 3?"

"E.T.A. is now... forty five minutes, fifty three seconds." Sulu glanced at him as though he expected the Captain to say something else.

Kirk sighed inwardly. Oh well, it was about time for the usual question of the day. Long-sufferingly, he asked, "Where is she now?"

Sulu grinned; he had been waiting for that. "Engineering, Captain."

"Nosing around again," Kirk muttered more to himself than anyone else. "I'm going down there," he decided abruptly. "Mr Spock, take the con." Kirk headed for the turbolift at a run, mentally composing what he'd say to her when he got to Engineering.

Gisa Varristaan, however, appeared to be merely strolling around talking to people. Scott had one eye on her, watching her progress, a jaundiced expression on his face. Kirk went over to Scott first, suddenly loath to tackle Gisa directly. *This isn't like you, Jim*, he told himself, but all at once he didn't care.

"Everything in order, Mr Scott?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

Scott gave a sour grunt. "Aye. Ah was just trying to keep a canny eye on the wolf in sheep's clothing."

"Wolf, Scotty?" Kirk grinned. "She doesn't have big teeth."

"Nor big ears neither," Scott grumbled, "but that doesn't mean she isn't Romulan."

"Half Romulan, Scotty," Kirk corrected.

"Aye, but that's the half that worries me," Scott confessed.

"Come now, Mr Scott; different race, different culture. Be tolerant." Kirk expelled a soft breath of reluctance. "She's on our side, you know."

"Aye, Captain. If you say so." Scott favoured him with a wary look and Kirk shrugged. It was time to face the lioness in her den. Bracing himself, he went over to her.

"Gisa." It was time for straight answers, he thought.

"Captain Kirk." She glanced up from the console she had been studying, those blue and teal eyes twinkling at him, and for a split second he forgot what he had been about to say.

Gisa Varristaan really was a stunning-looking woman, and for a moment all Kirk saw was the very dark, strawberry-auburn hair, the fine, straight nose and full lower lip. *No wonder Bones was bowled over by her*, he thought. Getting a grip on himself, he said, "Gisa, I need some honest answers. Just why are you on my ship?"

She frowned, a hint of impatience showing in those glorious eyes. "We've been over this before, Captain."

"I know," Kirk said, "and for two months all I've had is evasive answers and dilatory put downs, and I'm tired of it, Gisa. I want to know, truthfully, why you're here."

"I've told you," she said shortly. "It's classified."

"Classified? Damnit, Gisa!" He bit back a much stronger curse. "Can't you tell me what's going on?"

"I'm sorry, Jim. I'd really like to, but it's just not possible." Her deep, husky voice was warmer now but no less firm.

"But Gisa, if you'd really like to tell me then can't we just cut through all this by-the-book stuff?" He sighed wearily. "I mean, come on! This is only me asking. How about a little something off the record?"

But once again, Gisa shook her head. "I'm sorry, Jim."

He stared at her, feeling totally stone-walled. "Not even that much, huh?"

She smiled wryly. "Not even that."

"I see." Kirk set his shoulders back, drawing himself up straighter; she was as tall as he was, although he tried not to let that faze him. "Well let me tell you something," he began. "I don't like being given the run-around by Starfleet. I don't like people who play cryptic games with me and refuse to hand out information. I have a ship to run and if your lack of information puts any of my crew in danger, or disrupts the smooth flow of..."

"Jim, I understand that you feel frustrated," she broke in gently, "and believe me, when the time is right you'll be told as much as you need to know; but until then you'll have to learn to be patient, all right?"

Quietly, Kirk seethed. He hated these 'Need-to-know' missions and in particular he hated being condescended to by Gisa damn Varristaan. *What is it about the woman that sets my hackles rising? he wondered.*

"Look, Jim," Gisa's voice took on a consoling quality. "This mission is much too serious and much too important for me to talk about it and if I hand out information prematurely it could endanger the lives of your crew. Now you don't want that, do you?"

He rubbed his jaw between his fingers, suddenly aware of the need to go down to the gym and work off some of his excess anger. "No," he said at last, "I don't want that."

"Please try to understand," Gisa said with a sigh, "this is not something that can be..."

All at once she broke off, a faraway, trance-like look coming into her eyes. Kirk saw the blue and teal irises mist over, then slowly an expression of horror and shock filled her gaze.

"Gisa, what is it?" he asked.

She gasped, tried to form words, but for a second only inarticulate sounds came out of her. Then, upon a choking breath, she cried, "S-Sarek!"

Kirk gave a start, suddenly seeing something that he should have realised a few days ago. Gisa Varristaan was telepathic!

"Gisa! What is it? Tell me what it is!" he cried, grabbing her by the shoulders. "Is it the Ambassador? Is he hurt? In danger?"

"NO! Sarek... I..." She jerked free of his hold, her hands flying to her head. "It... I... Oh my God... It's no use. Can't get through... It's no use!"

"Gisa!" He tried to grab her, steady her, but missed her flailing hands. "Gisa, stop it!"

"It's no use!" she cried again. "Don't you understand? It's no use - he isn't there... Can't find him! Don't you see? Sarek isn't there any more!"

"Gisa, stop this! Snap out of it!" Kirk yelled. He had to slap her, it seemed the only way. She gasped under the slap, choking sounds emerging from her. He hit her again and finally her eyes cleared. She appeared to come out of it.

Taking a shaking breath she said, "Thank you, Jim."

"What the hell was all that about?" he asked "Is Sarek hurt or in danger?"

"No, it's not Sarek," Gisa said with deadly calm, "It's the Lady Amanda. We've got to go back to Vulcan right away, Jim. It's Amanda who is in danger, and Sarek doesn't know!"

In the moment that Amanda saw his eyes, saw the merciless hatred and vicious triumph in them, she knew that this man was more than just dangerous; he was evil.

And Amanda screamed.

Not a physical scream, but a mental one, and all of its raw panic and terror was directed towards the one man who was mentally bonded with her, the one person who was the only hope for her survival. That was when Amanda discovered that Sarek wasn't there any more. Mentally she couldn't reach him. His presence, that warm masculine presence that usually hovered on the edges of her awareness, was simply gone. It was as if a wall of stone blocked the link of their marriage bond.

"He isn't coming," Jamie said with a giggle. "Sarek can't hear you."

She stared at him, her mind frozen, shock seizing her voice for some seconds. Then finally knowledge stirred into place, self awareness coming back. "You're telepathic, aren't you?" she asked. "Oh my god, you..."

"No, Amanda, you're mistaken," Jamie said, pouring himself a glass of wine. "It's simply that I have the ability - so I've been told - to block out the telepathic links that most Vulcans have with their bondmates."

"Oh." On some other insane level a more practical part of Amanda noted that his speech had changed, become

suddenly more sophisticated. She wondered then if he was a split personality. Forcing calm into her voice, Amanda asked, "What do you want from me, Jamie?"

"What do I want?" He grinned unpleasantly. "Lots of things."

"Eh... like what?" She really didn't care to know the answer to that question, but she had to keep him talking.

Jamie smiled as if he knew exactly what she was thinking. "You're very pretty, Amanda," he said, and abruptly a pensive look came over his face. "Why did you marry him?"

"Him?"

"Don't play games!" he snapped furiously. "You know who I mean. Him. Sarek. Why did you marry him, Amanda?"

Hysterical laughter came bubbling up from somewhere down inside her as she thought of saying, 'At the time, it seemed the logical thing...' Instead she replied as steadily as she could, "Well, when two people fall in love, Jamie, they get married, just as I'm sure you will one day."

"What do you take me for? A fool?" he raged. "Do you really think he'll let me?"

Amanda said nothing to this, but she wondered who he meant by 'he'.

Jamie approached her and Amanda cringed as he came closer. She saw then that he had produced some strong cord from his pocket and for a minute Amanda wondered if he was going to strangle her with it. Her relief was evident as he put her hands behind her back and proceeded to tie her wrists.

"I'm sorry, Amanda, but I can't have you trying to reach a comlink," he said. "You could try to contact Sarek that way and that will never do."

Kneeling down, he quickly tied her feet too, then finally straightened, satisfied with his results. "There, now you can't run away." He smiled at her, but Amanda didn't feel like smiling back. She watched in trepidation as he went to the wall and studied the weapons displayed there for a moment. Amanda's gaze went to the *ahn vsahr*, the Vulcan ceremonial sword, double bladed, which had belonged to Sarek's father and now belonged to him in turn. It had been in the family for centuries, a dark reminder of Vulcan's bloodthirsty past. Amanda held her breath. Would he...?

But no. It was another weapon that Jamie lifted down from the wall. A much smaller weapon. It was a little like a dagger and had a slender curved blade, perhaps thirteen or fourteen centimetres in length. This weapon was called an *ahn wihhr*, and Amanda watched in horror as he played with it, ran his thumb experimentally down the blade, wincing when he cut himself. Jamie put the bleeding finger into his mouth, sucked it for a moment, then slowly came over to where Amanda sat, a distinctly evil gleam in his eyes.

When he pressed the blade to her throat Amanda stiffened, ice cold dread settling in her gut like a leaden weight. He traced the blade over her skin, not pressing hard enough to break the skin; it was just a warning, a hint of what was to come.

"We're going to play a little game, Amanda." Jamie said. "I'm going to ask you some questions, see, and if you fail to give me the right answers... then..." He grinned viciously. "Then it's 'bye, bye, Amanda'."

She could only stare at him, her heart thumping wildly, choking back the sob of pure terror which threatened to burst from her lips. No, she told herself fiercely, she wouldn't cry in front of him. She wouldn't let him have that pleasure. But all her hopes and prayers were cold ashes now. There was no way of reaching Sarek, he had made certain of that, and she could only sit and try to face her own death with dignity, prepare herself for the inevitable as Jamie began to laugh... and laugh... and laugh... The sound of that manic laughter rang in her ears seemingly forever, rasping through her like a knife. It chilled her to think that his laughter might be the last thing she would ever hear.

Dr Arnold Kinsellia might be a brilliant biologist, Sarek thought, but he questioned the man's taste in public bars. After a rather frustrating day at the Academy handling several bickering bureaucrats and sorting legal papers, Sarek had been pleased to accept Dr Arnold's offer of a drink. The biologist said he knew a bar where they served 'The finest raw bourbon know to man.' Arnold's very words. The prospect of such a drink only became less pleasing to Sarek when he realised that the biologist was taking him to a bar in ShanaiKahr's tourist section, the seedy side of the tourist section.

Sarek had never dreamed that such a place could ever exist on Vulcan. Humans mingled here with Rigellians, Lemnorian, Klingons, Tellarites and just about every other race in the Federation, all of whom seemed to be drunk, disorderly, broke, on drugs, just starting a fight or lying in a doorway as the result of having lost a fight. The majority were Humans, or rather they just about classified as being Human. They were much better known as the dregs of

society and already Sarek had been offered drugs of an uncertain type, alcohol of questionable origin, pills of every colour, even tobacco and - inevitably - sex.

Even as Sarek sat there watching Arnold get increasingly intoxicated and wondering why the man seemed to need the alcohol so much, one of the female dancers of Human appearance descended from the stage to brush past Sarek on her way down, sinuously stroking her fingers erotically along the Ambassador's left shoulder and throwing him a flagrantly inviting glance.

Sarek wasn't prepared for it and didn't have time to pull away as her fingers trailed their way down his sleeve. The look she gave him was enough to set mattresses alight, and Sarek recoiled from her automatically. She blew him a kiss, then leaned closer to whisper something in his ear, and although her words were spoken in a corrupted form of Andorian with which he was not familiar, nonetheless he understood enough of it to perceive her words as inordinately filthy. She giggled, then withdrew when she spotted more promising prey on the other side of the room. Sarek sighed inwardly. It wasn't the first time he had received such an obvious sexual invitation since he'd arrived in this area of town, although not all had been as blatant as the dancer. Some had merely stared and moaned yearningly as he passed by, others gawped at him merely because he was a Vulcan and most Vulcans were not known to visit the tourist section - well, not this part of it anyway.

Sarek glanced at Kinsellia again. "Doctor, I fail to see the logic in choosing this particular bar," he stated. "I find no difference between the flavour of the bourbon here from that of other bars."

Kinsellia shook his head, rubbing

wearily at one eye as he did so. "You Vulcans are all the same," he muttered. "Never any fun at all." He gestured broadly with one arm, almost spilling the glass of bourbon he held. "The trouble with you people is, none of you really know how to relax."

"I take it that by 'relaxation' you mean doing something that is generally very energetic," Sarek remarked, lifting one eyebrow with veiled characteristic amusement.

"Not nesscer... eh nesscer..." Kinsellia couldn't say the word, by now too inebriated to articulate properly. "Not particularly," he finished ruefully.

Sarek's expression changed subtly, his eyes narrowing as he studied the Human more carefully. There was something behind Kinsellia's need to get intoxicated, he thought. Something was bothering him. Kinsellia was normally irascible and sometimes extremely difficult, true, but the man was not generally irresponsible. Perhaps something was wrong in his work, Sarek thought. "Doctor, how are the experiments coming?" he asked.

Kinsellia frowned. He was about to say something when his unit-pager began bleeping wildly. "Confounded thing," Kinsellia glanced down at the unit attached to his hip, then clumsily stood up. "It must be my office calling. If you'll excuse me, Sarek?"

"Of course, Doctor." Sarek watched as the Human rather unsteadily made his way to a public comm booth.

More than ever now Sarek began to feel that the man had some quite serious problem. However, if Dr Arnold Kinsellia did not wish to talk about his problem then there was very little that Sarek could do to help and he did not

wish to probe into a Human's privacy, especially when his help had not been asked for.

Instead Sarek turned his thoughts to Amanda, and allowed himself an inward smile. Knowing her dislike of using the kitchen computer, he conjectured that she would be preparing dinner in approximately ten or twelve minutes. He estimated however that, allowing for traffic, and also for first seeing Dr Kinsellia home, he would be exactly thirteen and a half minutes late. It would be only logical to let Amanda know that he would not be on time, he thought. Even as this occurred to him, Sarek instinctively reached mentally for her as he had done on countless other occasions, but this time, instead of encountering Amanda's warm, pleasantly illogical presence, he reached only a blank.

It was like a wall, a blockage obstructing him from Amanda, as though the telepathic link had been severed once and for all. This had never happened before in all the years of their marriage and Sarek suddenly felt panic surging up. A dark, black panic telling him that something was terribly wrong. Fear for Amanda began driving away reason and logic. Nothing... nothing had ever interrupted their marriage-bond before. Only death could totally obliterate the bond. That or unconsciousness. If she were merely asleep that would not create this... blankness. He would be able to sense her dreams at least. But this! This was a... a... a Nothing.

"Amanda!" Sarek was unaware that he had actually spoken her name aloud, that he was on his feet. He only became cognizant of these factors when Arnold Kinsellia came up, anxiety on his face.

"I have to get back to the lab right away," Kinsellia said. "One of our newest experimental.. uh... life-forms has

escaped and I fear that it's going to take an awful lot of work to..."

"Doctor." Intuition pricked at Sarek's awareness. "This life-form of yours - where was it seen heading?"

"Well," Kinsellia shrugged, "I gather it was seen heading for ShiKahr, but that doesn't mean any- " He didn't finish. Sarek didn't allow him to finish.

"Which particular life-form is this, Doctor?"

"Well, it's called a Sneedrac, but that doesn't really tell you very much about it. We don't know that much ourselves yet. The creature's existence is fairly new to us, but we're learning all we can and already we have discovered that the Sneedrac has some amazing abilities."

"Such as?" Sarek's voice had become harsher than usual, although Kinsellia didn't seem to notice.

"Well, this this life-form looks Human, but of course it isn't. But then, we've only ever seen it amongst humanoid types and we're fairly certain that its real form may be vastly different. It's really two creatures in one, a sort of host/parasite, which makes it a little like a Human with a split personality."

"Doctor, you have not answered my question," Sarek broke in with a sudden urgency that made Kinsellia look at him sharply.

"Oh... ah, its abilities, yes." Kinsellia scratched his head, abruptly looking a trifle urgent himself. "Look, Sarek, I haven't really got time for this, but one of its abilities is to be able to actually block the telepathy of Vulcans."

"Block.?" Sarek pushed back the absurd panic he had felt winging up. It

was no use leaping to illogical conclusions, he told himself. Nonetheless, with a calmness he did not feel, Sarek said, "Doctor, I find myself suddenly unable to communicate telepathically with my wife."

"Oh my God!" Kinsellia stared at him, eyes widening. "The Sneedrac can do that. It can block the bonding between two Vulcans if it concentrates on that person in particular."

"But I have never seen this creature, Doctor," Sarek began. "I do not understand how..."

"Its telepathy is not like that of Vulcans," Kinsellia interrupted. "In some respects its abilities are much more powerful, we know that much already. But, Sarek, we don't know enough about it. All I can give you is conjecture. There is some evidence, however, to support the fact that possibly it can 'monitor' its victims telepathically, watch and follow a certain individual without that person even being aware of it. What else it's capable of, we're just not sure, but we know it doesn't much like Vulcans, and ninety-nine per cent of its telepathy seems to be geared towards hostility. It also seems to..." Suddenly Kinsellia broke off, his eyes widening in horror. "Oh my God, Sarek... It is interested in oddities, irregularities... Anything that is different, any individual who may lead a different kind of life-style."

"And I am one of the few Vulcans who are married to a Human." Sarek concluded.

For a moment Kinsellia stood there, transfixed, frozen, his mouth hanging stupidly open.

"We shall take your car, Doctor," Sarek said, seeing that the Human was unable to act. "I think it wise that we

should proceed with all due speed."

James T. Kirk sat rigidly in his command chair, his hands gripping the arms with such force that his knuckles showed white. He watched the stars fly past on the Bridge's main viewscreen and wished himself already back on Vulcan. Even at their present speed of warp seven, it would still take a couple of hours before they reached Vulcan. Amanda could be dead in a couple of minutes, never mind hours, Kirk told himself.

Since Gisa Varristaan had explained just what kind of danger Amanda was in, Kirk had been hell-bent on getting back to Vulcan as fast as possible. He wasn't exactly sure of what he would do when he got there, but he knew that he'd do all he could to help Spock's mother. *And to hell with the risks*, he added to himself savagely.

He only wished he could drag more speed out of the Enterprise, but Scott had explained that warp eight could be quite risky. "Push her up past warp seven and we could well start having problems," Scott had said. "After that trouble we had with the Orions a few weeks back, her engines are still not quite up to par. Ah wouldna go tryin' warp eight just yet, Captain. It's askin' a wee bit too much."

Given advice like that from Scott, Kirk knew there was no arguing. He sighed, shifting and fidgeting restlessly in the command chair. His impatience had begun to affect the rest of the Bridge crew and even the normally unflappable Sulu had unconsciously begun to ape Kirk's fidgeting. Behind him, standing not far from Spock's science station, Gisa Varristaan smiled slightly, amused by Kirk's restlessness and aware that, had it been possibly, James Kirk would have got

out and pushed the Enterprise.

Suddenly Kirk caught himself as he realised he was chewing his knuckles again. *Damn!* he thought; normally he only did that when... Abruptly he swung his chair around. Until now he hadn't been aware that Gisa Varristaan had entered the Bridge. She must have come in with Chekov when he began his shift. Hell, no wonder he had been squirming and chewing on his knuckles! It alarmed him somewhat to discover that he could sense her presence in this way even when he didn't actually know she was there. Could it possibly be that her telepathy affected him? But no; Gisa had explained that her telepathic abilities only went one way. Turning to her now, Kirk asked, "Gisa, about this... thing that has Amanda in its clutches..."

"An entity, Captain Kirk," she interjected. "That is the best way to describe it."

"This entity then," he went on. "Just how dangerous is it?"

"Very dangerous, Captain," she replied. "I'd advised against charging it with a phaser."

Kirk's smile was strained and thin. "I wasn't planning on doing that."

"I'm sure you weren't." Those dual-coloured eyes measured Kirk with amusement and a strange kind of affection. "However," she continued, "I would also advise against creeping up on it with a phaser in hand."

Kirk goggled at her for a moment, then, furious with himself, realised he was actually blushing. To cover his embarrassment he said, "I thought you said your telepathy only went one way, Gisa."

"It does only go one way, Captain." She smiled. "You can call that more... intuition."

Intuition? Kirk thought. *But she doesn't know me all that well, or does she?*

"The creature that has Amanda in its power is highly telepathic, Jim," Gisa said gently. "It can sense you coming from a mile off, so the first thing you'll have to learn is how to shield yourself from it."

His mind whirled at this knowledge. "But then... If that's what is required," he began, "then surely Spock can teach me how..."

"No, Jim." This time it was Spock who spoke. "I am afraid that would not suffice. Vulcans are only touch telepaths. We can verbalise telepathically through a bonding, but that is the limit of our abilities. Officer Varristaan, however, has somewhat more... advanced... psychic talents. I would suggest that if anyone handle this creature, it should be her."

"That's exactly what I had in mind," Gisa emphasised. "I can teach Spock some mental procedures in order to shield himself sufficiently. I can strengthen his mental barriers. As for you, Jim, I strongly advise that you stay away from the action as much as possible because if you don't, your presence can only hinder us. Let Spock and me handle it. All right?"

He balked at that. It wasn't in his nature to stay out of a fight, but at present he didn't want to start an argument with her. After a second's pause Kirk said, "All right. But tell me, Gisa - what happens if even you can't handle this creature?"

"Then," she smiled ruefully, "as we say back on my home planet, we are up

the chute without a paddle-float." She shrugged and added, "And that's just for starters."

Kirk closed his eyes for a second, gritting his teeth. What he thought was *Oh... Great!*

He had been playing with the knife all the time, never letting it slip from her gaze as he asked her various questions about how long she had been married to Sarek, why she had chosen a Vulcan. All the time Amanda was very much aware of the blade which never strayed away from her eyes.

When Jamie asked her if she and Sarek had any children, Amanda hesitated, unwilling to drag Spock into this horror even by association. "I... No," she answered too quickly. "No children."

His blow came without warning, swift, savage, a full roundhouse delivery which knocked her, chair and all, to the floor.

Amanda's head rang painfully. Jamie had viciously hit her with almost all his strength. Tears sprang involuntarily from her eyes, but she furiously tried to blink them back, biting her lower lip to stop it trembling. She had always known that there were many life-forms, both on Vulcan and off, that had far greater strength than herself.

Sarek's strength, she knew, was enough to crush her, but Sarek had never hurt her, not intentionally. Once, yes, during the first pon farr, but even then, not viciously, not with such malice, such open, vitriolic fury! Sarek had never, ever hurt her like this!

Wanting to sob from the pain of it, from the terror, Amanda somehow

stopped herself from uttering those sobs, willing it with a grim, bitter determination.

"Bitch! Don't lie to me!" he screamed down at her. "Don't play games!"

She gave a start from the sheer volume of his voice, the naked ugly hate in it. She steeled herself when he came close, grabbed her by the front of her dress; the light, thin, Vulcan robe tore easily in his violent grasp as he hauled her and the chair upright.

"You see, I... I don't like being lied to, Amanda," he went on in a calmer yet no less insane tone. "If you're gonna lie to me then... then I can't make it work, Amanda. It's just not going to work, don't you see that?"

"Yes, I understand, Jamie," she said, trying to sound as controlled as possible.

Unexpectedly he put his face close to hers, brandishing the knife again. "Then how many children?" he rasped, his voice growing louder again.

"One. One son." Amanda was trying very hard to hide her trembling limbs. To her own ears her voice sounded hoarse, flat, as if somehow dried up of all its hope. *Oh, Sarek!* she thought. *Please come. Please god, let Sarek come.*

Jamie was pacing up and down now, ahn wihr still in hand. The thought occurred to Amanda that he suddenly looked more trapped than she did.

"I... I don't want to hurt you, Amanda," he said, once more sounding like the little-boy-lost. "Please don't make me hurt you."

The sincerity in his words was also terrifying. She now had to struggle to keep her composure. "I'll try not to,

Jamie," she promised, swallowing back the icy dread that seized her.

The stone cold fact that he was completely out of control, totally insane, chilled her more than anything else. He could lose the paper-thin hold that he had on reality at any time. One wrong word or gesture on her part and the man would go totally over the edge. Jamie might kill himself, of course, but he would also take Amanda with him.

She braced herself as he came over to her again. Her eyes were on the ahn wihr that he held, but he stuck the weapon in his belt and only knelt at her feet, quickly untying the cord that he had fastened around her ankles. Amanda tensed. So, she was to be untied for some reason. He couldn't possibly have come here on foot, she thought. He must have a ground-car outside and if that was the case, once her hands and feet were untied she could make a dash for the car and perhaps escape.

Having finished untying her feet, he walked around behind her and proceeded to undo her wrists. Amanda prepared herself for the dash.

But no, he was not that careless, and once he had freed her hands he transferred his grip to her hair, drawing her painfully to her feet.

"Ah no, Amanda!" he rasped, as he felt her struggle against the tight hold he had on her silver tresses. "It's not going to be that easy." She sensed him grinning, then suddenly she felt the knife again, pricking at the back of her neck. She realised then that he was holding the blade beneath her hair, preparing to slice.

Normally Amanda wore her hair tied or pinned back for more efficiency, but today she had let it flow loose. She resisted the impulse to squirm again as

she felt his hot breath tickling the back of her neck.

"Shall I cut it, Amanda?" he giggled, tugging tightly on her hair. "Would Sarek like that? Would he like to see you shorn?" She did not respond, deliberately forcing calm into her otherwise shattered nerves.

"Come on!" Jamie growled, dragging her by the hair. "We're leaving."

"Leaving?" Shock forced the word out past her tongue. She hadn't intended questioning him.

"Well we wouldn't want Sarek to find us here, would we?"

Putting the blade of the ahn wihr to her throat, he pushed her outside to where a ground car was situated. Amanda recognised the vehicle as belonging to Stepell, one of Sarek's colleagues at the Academy. She wondered how Jamie had managed to over-ride the car's security systems to allow him to steal it, but there was no more time for questions or arguments as he hustled her over to the car. Hitting the door-seal with his boot, Jamie opened the car door and forced Amanda inside, helpless to resist him, gritting her teeth as he tied the knots so tightly the cord bit agonisingly into her wrists. He tied her feet again too, with the same cruel strength, then she watched helplessly as he rummaged in the back of the car and she saw in the driving mirror that he lifted out a large plastic container and two other smaller containers.

"What are you doing? What are you up to?" Amanda demanded.

He looked at her as if he considered that the most ridiculous question he'd ever heard.

"Why, I'm going to leave a message for Sarek," he smiled. "After all, you just can't go out without leaving a message for your loved ones. Isn't that right, Amanda?" His laughter was loud, cruel and insane. Amanda's stomach heaved at the sound of it and she knew he was definitely planning something diabolical.

Sarek gunned Arnold Kinsellia's car at top speed through the traffic, wrenching the vehicle around corners with frightening velocity, taking it tight on the turns and throwing Kinsellia from side to side in his seat like a rag doll.

"For godsake, Sarek, slow down!" Kinsellia implored. "I want to live to collect my Surak Awards for science."

Sarek threw him a quick glance, busy at the wheel. "An illogical and somewhat arrogant assumption, Doctor," he stated, "since so far your single contribution to the Vulcan Academy has not exactly proved beneficial." Which was Sarek's long-winded way of saying that he didn't like Kinsellia's experiments. Arnold, however just chuckled quietly to himself. He was surprisingly thick-skinned, but then, in his chosen field Sarek supposed he had to be.

Finally, with a wrenching scream of compressed air braking system, Sarek pulled the ground car to a halt outside his house and the two men quickly got out and raced up the drive to the house, Arnold Kinsellia bringing up the rear through having to keep pace with Sarek's longer strides.

The front door was already open, and that sight alone was enough to cause a sinking feeling in Sarek's stomach when normally it wouldn't have bothered him in the least. In the hall he cried out, "Amanda!" Not that he expected an

answer. Sarek was fully aware that she might well be unconscious. In the living room he came to a sudden sharp, shocked halt.

The place was a mess, tables and chairs over-turned, books and papers scattered. Cushions from the settee had been slashed, flock spilling out of them. Ornaments had been flung about everywhere in wild disarray, but the worst of it was the large, white couch which had what looked very like a huge, dark bloodstain up the back of it.

The sight of that ended all logic and hope. His gut twisted sickly at the implications. "Amanda!" he groaned aloud. If she was dead then he would soon be dead too, although at that point Sarek no longer cared. Or perhaps not. Possibly she was just seriously wounded, Sarek thought, clinging to that slim last shred of hope.

"They're gone, Sarek. There's nobody in the house," Kinsellia said, coming through from the kitchen. "But I found these in your garbage." Kinsellia held up two plastic containers of the type that healers used for storing blood. "These haven't contained Vulcan blood, Sarek," Arnold said, opening one of them. "What was in here was Human blood." His gaze went to the couch as he spoke, to the bloodstain that Sarek was still staring at there.

"That...bastard!" Sarek spat, whirling around to face the scientist. All logic was gone now. Sarek was driven by fear and utter rage.

"Where would the Sneedrac take Amanda?" he demanded of Kinsellia.

"Well, I... We're not quite sure of all its habits yet, and..."

The thin control that Sarek had on

his patience snapped then. Grabbing Kinsellia by the front of his shirt, Sarek lifted the Human four inches off the ground and shook him.

"Where would it take Amanda?!"

Kinsellia had never had a Vulcan raise his or her voice to him before, let alone lift him off his feet. For a second he could only gawp at Sarek in terrified astonishment. He'd heard rumours of Sarek's famous temper, but had never believed them to be real.

Finally he managed to croak out, "The... the Sneedrac like a... a cooler atmosphere, a more moist environment. Possibly somewhere high...?"

"The mountains!" Sarek grated, dropping Kinsellia like an unwanted computer program.

"Wait! Sarek!" The shorter, tubbier Kinsellia had to run to catch up with the Vulcan.

"Sarek!" he roared, racing outside. "You can't face it alone. The Sneedrac is very danger- " He spoke too late. Sarek had already driven the ground car away, not even waiting for the scientist. Heedless of the danger, Sarek was racing to meet it.

"Vulcan Space Central, this is the Starship USS Enterprise on emergency channel. Please advise Ambassador Sarek his wife is very great danger. Acknowledge." Uhura waited for the acknowledgement, then followed the inevitable questions and explanations. When she had finished she turned to the Captain with a wry shrug.

"They say that they cannot locate Sarek, Captain," she told Kirk. "He isn't

at the Academy and he isn't at his home."

"Hmn. My guess is Sarek already somehow knows the bad news," Kirk hypothesised.

"Jim." Gisa Varristaan stepped forward. "We have to stop him. No Vulcan can handle the creature I've sensed alone. This entity is too powerful. It could kill Sarek."

"How? Telepathically?"

"Well, yes. And no." Gisa drew a wry grimace. "Now that I'm closer to Vulcan, I can sense two minds. One of them mentally stronger... the other stronger physically, and one of those two minds is controlling, blotting out the other. The trouble is.... I'm not sure which."

"Two minds?" Jim asked, frowning.

"Yes, but they're both the same personality." Gisa shook her head, frustrated by her own inadequacy to describe what she felt. "It's hard to explain, Jim. You'd have to be a telepath to understand."

"I too can sense something of this creature," Spock put in. "However, not as strongly as Officer Varristaan does." He turned to Gisa and looked at her with a sudden intensity. "If all else fails there is one final option we can take," he informed her.

If Gisa Varristaan felt any surprise she didn't show it. "And that is?"

Spock sighed. "I will not speak of it lest the creature discern my plans from your thoughts." He steepled his fingers before him. "If memory serves correctly, you said that this entity can sense a person coming from several miles away."

"Yes, I did," Gisa nodded.

"Then," Spock paused for just a fraction of a second, "what I have in mind will most definitely have to serve as a last moment resource."

"I take it you mean at the twelfth hour, as usual," Kirk put in with a rueful grin.

"Yes, Captain, precisely that," Spock nodded.

"There is, however, one other thing we're over-looking," Gisa said. "Now that we're much closer to this... entity, I can sense other aspects to it, and one of those aspects is its fascination with physical combat." She took a deep breath and added, "Captain, the creature may well abandon its telepathic abilities simply in order to fight its opponents physically." Unexpectedly, she smiled. "And if it does so," she went on, "then we might have a better chance of fully defeating the thing."

Amanda had been shoved, pushed and pulled up the mountain pass for what felt like hours, but could really only have been about twenty minutes. Finally, beneath a sharply out-jutting tooth of rock, Jamie let her rest, and Amanda sat on a stone ledge, trying to get her breath back. Her dress clung damply to the backs of her legs and she could feel perspiration trickling down inside her collar. She noticed that Jamie was sweating too, although not as much as she.

"Here." Quite unexpectedly, he handed her a water bottle. Amanda regarded the drinking vessel in some suspicion for a moment, then slowly, warily, she accepted the bottle and took a sip.

It was water. It was a little warm

by now and tasted faintly metallic, but was satisfying to her nonetheless. She had to use both hands as she drank, for Jamie had not yet untied her hands, only her feet so that she would be able to walk. But at least instead of behind her back, she now had them tied in front.

"Thank you, Jamie," she said at last, handing the bottle back to him.

"You see, Amanda?" he said with a grin. "I can be nice when I like."

She did not answer, but only kept her eyes down as she heard him put the water bottle away.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you!" he rasped, forcibly yanking her head up to meet his eyes. "Why don't you answer? Don't you like me, Amanda?" He shook his head almost sorrowfully. "Damn you, Amanda. I've tried every way I know to make you like me and I'm losing patience."

She swallowed, trying to squash down the bubble of terror that his implicit threat brought up. "L-liking takes time, Jamie," she stuttered. "Y-you have to give me more time..."

"No!" An ugly scowl crossed his face. "I've given you enough time." Then his tone changed, became wheedling and creepily persuasive. "You know, if you're nice to me, Amanda... things might be much more pleasant." He began stroking her hair as he spoke and Amanda stared in horror. Surely he didn't mean what she thought he meant? But it quickly became all too clear to her that that was exactly what he did mean. She felt his hand drop lower to fleetingly caress her left breast. "We could have a good time, Amanda."

She flinched away. "No, I can't! I'm married, Jamie," she protested. "I'm

married to Sarek."

"Forget Sarek!" he growled. "Sarek's history."

"No!" Amanda wrenched her head away as he sought to kiss her, and when he grabbed her and pulled her to him she struggled all the more. Dear God, Amanda thought, he meant to rape her!

She tried to kick him but he pinned her arms and legs, his full body weight on top of hers, and she felt him tearing her dress, pressing his hot mouth to her neck. Amanda struggled in vain. The crushing weight of his body on hers, the sheer physicality of him, made her stomach heave sickly.

"No!" she cried. "Jamie... please - No!" Finally she managed to get her knee in position and then drove it quickly, sharply, up, aiming the blow where it was sure to hurt most. He doubled over, gagging, rolling away from her, hands cupping the most vulnerable part of his anatomy. As Amanda scrambled to her feet he knelt for a moment or two, eyes squeezed shut in pain, his breath heaving in Vulcan's thinner atmosphere. But then slowly he recovered, getting to his feet.

"That wasn't very nice, Amanda," he said, advancing on her again. "Now I'm going to have to teach you a little respect."

Amanda backed away in terror, sensing the unleashed violence within him. He reached for her, grabbing her by one shoulder, was preparing to slap her when a voice called out from above.

"Stop!"

The scene froze like some Greek play as both Amanda and Jamie glanced upwards, straining to see against Vulcan's harsh sunlight. Then the figure above

moved out of the glare of the sun and came slowly down towards them.

Amanda gasped. Sarek looked as she had never seen him before in all the days of their marriage. Her gentle, caring, logical husband was gone and now Amanda sensed the very thin strand of control that just barely kept him from flying at the interloper. She had always known that Sarek had a temper. Occasionally he had displayed brief lapses before, quick flashes of hot but not vindictive, anger, but until now Sarek had always been able to control.

Now that iron-like control had snapped completely and Amanda saw that his fists were clenched, his robes torn and dirtied from scrambling and climbing over rocks. His face seemed to be carved from stone, frozen into a glance that would have petrified even the Medusa herself. As for his eyes...! Sarek's eyes glittered with a menace that even frightened Amanda herself.

Her gut wrenched sickly as he came ever closer to them, all of his movements deliberately slow, prolonged and calculated, and for the first time Amanda sensed the utter insanity her husband might be capable of.

"Sarek, no..." she pleaded as he came closer. "Sarek, think of what you're doing, please. This isn't logical."

"Logic?" Jamie laughed. "Your husband has forgotten logic, Amanda! Look at him. He's an animal."

"No!" Amanda whispered, her face greying. She had witnessed Sarek in the pon farr many times but this was far worse. Sarek stalked Jamie, his movements uncannily reminding Amanda of a le-matya, but Jamie seemed to disregard any possible danger. He faced Sarek, smiling.

"Step away from Amanda!" Sarek ordered, his voice revealing the barely contained fury he felt.

Jamie only folded his arms across his chest, still smiling. "Ah! Vulcan's glorious past has come to meet us!" He grinned widely. "Ancient savagery, so I see. Were you aware, Amanda, that your husband could revert this easily?" Jamie giggled. "He's really quite splendid, isn't he? Maybe when I've finished with him, I should hang him up on a wall as a trophy. Sarek the barbarian! In all his defeated splendour."

"Stop it! Stop baiting him!" Amanda cried. "Don't you realise how dangerous he is right now?"

"Of course I do," Jamie sneered. "But that's the whole point. What use would Sarek be if he wasn't dangerous? There is no point in any battle that doesn't present some danger." Abruptly Jamie smiled at her. "But you needn't worry," he told Amanda, "Sarek can't really hurt me very much, and once he's dead we can take up where we left off. I'm sure you'll soon come to learn how to make love to me, Amanda."

That was enough for Sarek. He'd heard enough and with a roar of absolute, insensate fury, he launched himself at Jamie, flying for the man's throat.

Even Jamie had not anticipated Sarek's speed and he was still laughing when Sarek hit him, bearing the two of them to the ground. The sheer power and savagery behind Sarek's spring made Jamie crash to the ground with all the wind knocked out of him and the Vulcan was swift to seize the advantage, hands curling around the other's throat. Jamie struggled and kicked to free himself, but Sarek had a deadly grip and refused to let go. Jamie was surprised to learn just how strong the Vulcan was, and he now

realised he had underestimated the Ambassador's threat.

Shrugging off his doubts, throwing away fear, Jamie heaved and threw the Vulcan off him, at last managing to prise Sarek's fingers loose. He was angry now, angry that he had let the Vulcan seize a momentary advantage. Standing erect, Jamie met Sarek's next rush with equally as much force and the two of them then proceeded to try and cancel each other out.

Amanda could only stare in stunned, speechless shock as she watched her husband cast away every last scrap of reason, throwing himself at the enemy like a madman.

The fight was all just pure power and speed as the two men waged merciless war upon each other. Sarek's speed was a little too fast for Amanda to follow with her Human eyes, but he was like a whirling dervish, one of Vulcan's sandstorms gone wild, a desert fury that could blast the flesh and lacerate through to the bone, tear through inner tissue and cartilage as though it were paper.

Jamie enjoyed the fight at first, and he thought himself clever in not revealing his full strength too early. He still, at that point, considered himself the stronger of the two. It was only when Sarek broke through his guard and lashed out a blow that flung Jamie high into the air to land several yards away on his back, that he began to appreciate fully the Ambassador's sheer power.

Jamie sat up, shaking his head a little to clear it. He had dancing, spinning lights before his eyes and a ringing in his ears. With a glower, he got to his feet. He wasn't going to let this pointy-eared elf make a show of him. Flinging himself back into the fight, Jamie dived at Sarek like a rocket. Sarek didn't see the rock in

his hand till it was too late. Amanda screamed as her husband was sent sprawling under a vicious blow, Jamie bludgeoning him on the forehead with the rock. Sarek hit the ground and lay there for a moment until he was alerted by Amanda's scream of warning.

"Sarek, look out!"

Jamie had picked up a bigger rock and was about to drop it onto Sarek's head, but Sarek quickly rolled out of the way and all the rock hit was the thin sand where his head had been. Not giving Jamie time to press any advantage, Sarek crashed into him in a rugby-style body slam, cannoning in under the ribcage and driving the other man into the wall of overhanging rock. Sarek smashed Jamie's head up and back, driving it into the rock with sickening force, then he slammed into the other man's body again and again. Jamie had to punch him in the mouth to make him stop.

He turned on Sarek like an owl-tiger, spitting and snarling, lashing home furious blows which drove the Vulcan back and further back. A green lake was running from Sarek's mouth and his forehead. By now his robes were spattered with green stains too. Not that it stopped him. He gave back every bit as good as he got, taking it and dishing it right back.

Amanda could only watch helplessly in ever-increasing horror as she tried to cut the ropes which bound her wrists by rubbing them against a sharp outcrop of rock.

This was madness, she thought. Oh God, Jamie had turned her husband into a killer! Amanda cried out again, unable to stop herself when she saw Jamie aim at Sarek's face with the rock he held, but Sarek grabbed the hand that intended to deal the blow and, prising Jamie's fingers

apart, he compelled the man to drop the rock, then with cruel, sadistic rage, he crushed in Jamie's hand, mashing the fingers, popping the knuckles. Jamie screamed in agony as the Vulcan mangled his hand, turning the limb into a broken, useless wreck and then casually released it, thrusting the ruined hand carelessly aside. Amanda stared with her mouth open. Even she hadn't dreamed that Sarek could do such a thing as that to another life-form.

Screaming a curse, Jamie retaliated by kicking out at Sarek's left leg, bruising the Vulcan in the process, and with a roar of pain, Sarek heeled the man in the jaw and Jamie fell, but he pulled the older man down with him, kicking, punching and scrabbling in the dirt; the two fought like demented maniacs, the violence escalating all the time, until they were both covered and streaked in their own blood, but still neither of them gave up.

Amanda saw countless blows being traded with awful power and sheer hatred, saw Jamie slowly but steadily gaining a stranglehold over Sarek and she cried out in horror as Jamie finally hammered Sarek down to the ground at his feet.

"No-o-o!" Amanda screamed. "No, no no, no!" She picked up the biggest rock she could find and threw it hard at Jamie. The stone missed him of course, but in that short interval she gave Sarek the moment he needed to regather his strength.

Uttering a roar of poisonous, unspeakable, black rage and defiance, Sarek leapt to his feet. Jamie turned, but wasn't quite fast enough to deflect the elbow which Sarek drove into his teeth. Jamie staggered on legs that had turned into lead, weaving, spinning lights twinkling across his vision. He felt himself lifted and slammed with crushing

force against the rock walls, and Jamie weakly began to cough up blood.

It occurred to him then, almost dispassionately, that the Vulcan was winning this contest. New respect was born in amidst fear. The mad laughter of irony echoed somewhere in Jamie's mind. *I thought he was only a Vulcan.* The thought caused more hysterical amusement. *But I had no idea... no idea at all...*

Sarek caught that thought even as Jamie surged back in one last desperate effort to survive. He had only his left hand to use, his right was useless, but once again Sarek's speed enabled him the evade the blow and he slapped Jamie's head to one side with truly ferocious strength, smashing his face into the rock wall and pushing it, scraping it along the stone and sheering away the skin in strips. Sarek both heard and felt the man's howl of pain but continued nonetheless, pounding Jamie's face repeatedly into the rock, not stopping, not thinking about it, just continuing to pound... and pound... and pound...

Jamie's head lolled brokenly on his shoulders, but that didn't matter to Sarek. His face was ruined, his body in so much agony it didn't bear thinking about. Dimly Jamie was aware of Sarek raising him into the air and taking him by the back of the neck, shaking him exultantly.

"Stop!" came the command from overhead, but Sarek didn't heed it. He wanted only to finish his opponent. He would snap this man in half like a reed.

"Sarek, stop!" It was Amanda's voice, and then others joined it, a woman's cry, the voice of James Kirk. He understood that they meant to help, that they were here out of concern for himself and Amanda, but the madness had too strong a hold, and when somebody grabbed Sarek's arms, tried to pull him

away, he responded automatically in the only way he could now. Turning to face James Kirk, Sarek, with a brief snarl, flung the interfering Human away.

Others came to take Kirk's place, their hands on him, attempting to pull him away. One of them was family.

"No, Father. Stop! This is not the way."

But even Spock could not stop him at this moment. Sarek pushed his son away, wanted none of him. He would not let Spock be a part of this madness. Sarek struggled against the others, trying to fling them in all directions, and nearly succeeded.

A hypo hissed against his arm and Sarek felt his strength drain away. He could no longer retain his grip on Jamie, and the man's body slipped from his grasp. Sarek stumbled, his brain whirling fuzzily, and he saw Dr McCoy, hypo still in his hand.

"You! Physician...!" He took two steps towards McCoy and the Human doctor backed up, his face going white.

Leonard McCoy had always been frightened of Vulcans, and Sarek in his present mood was utterly terrifying. McCoy would remember the moment for long years afterward; Sarek coming towards him... and that expression in his eyes. McCoy had never seen a Vulcan with that expression before and he hoped he never would again. When Sarek collapsed only a foot or so away from him, the sedative finally taking full effect, Leonard McCoy felt like doing a little fainting himself.

"Sweet Jesus!" McCoy muttered, eyes aloft, relief swimming giddily through every nerve end. Then, typically, he turned on Spock. "That was your

idea!" the Doctor snarled. "Don't ever ask me to do that again! I'd rather face a whole host of angry Klingons than tackle Sarek in that mood with a hypo!"

"I did not ask you to do it, Doctor," Spock said, unruffled. "I merely suggested that it might be appropriate to..."

"Oh, never mind." McCoy cut him off as Kirk approached. "Jim, you okay?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Kirk said, rubbing gingerly at his shoulder. "Just a little bruised is all, but I'll live," he grinned.

"Damn fool trying to tackle Sarek like that while he was in a frenzy!" McCoy grumbled. "You could have got yourself killed, Jim." He bent to examine Sarek as he spoke, and briefly ran the mediscanner over the Vulcan. "He'll be all right," was McCoy's opinion. "Just several cuts and some bruises, nothing fatal."

"I'm afraid that the same cannot be said for this one, Doctor," Gisa Varristaan said, standing up from where she had been bending over Jamie to examine him. "He's dead."

Jim Kirk frowned, coming to stand next to Gisa. "Was that your alien entity?" he asked her.

"Yes, it was. Strange." Puzzlement showed clearly in her spectacular eyes. "Shortly before we beamed down, I sensed only one mind. It's almost as if this being slipped into just the one conscious personality and was... unable to leave it."

"Well, whatever the thing was, it's dead now." McCoy said, "and let's just be thankful that it didn't harm Amanda."

"Or Sarek." Kirk put in with a wry grin.

McCoy snorted. "After this little lot I'd defy anything to mess with Sarek." The Doctor was still getting over his moment of raw terror at having Sarek advance on him. "Speaking of whom, he'll be coming round in a minute, Jim." As he spoke, McCoy went to stand near Spock. That made him feel just a little more confident.

"Doctor, I fail to understand why you are, so to speak, hiding behind me." Spock said huffily.

"Well, I figure that one Vulcan can handle another Vulcan," Bones explained. "You can be my protection, Spock."

"Not necessarily, Doctor." Spock maintained. "Physically my father is much stronger than I am."

McCoy's face dropped. "Oh, great!"

But of course when Sarek came around some moments later, McCoy didn't need any protection because Sarek was, by then, his normal cool, logical self. The first thing he said was, "Dr McCoy, you must forgive me for my outburst before. I fear that my... logic had deserted me."

"That's for damn sure!" Bones muttered under his breath.

Sarek undoubtedly heard, but chose not to comment. Instead he looked over to where Jamie's body lay still and silent on the ground.

It was Gisa Varristaan who answered Sarek's unspoken question and said, "Yes, Ambassador, he's dead I'm afraid."

"I see." Deliberately, Sarek put his hands behind his back, compelling calm. "That is ... regrettable."

"Did you know anything about him, Ambassador?" Gisa asked.

"I gather it was a life-form known as a Sneedrac. Other than that, I know very little." Sarek's gaze wandered, searching for and finding Amanda. "If you wish to know more of the Sneedrac, then I suggest you contact Dr Arnold Kinsellia at the Vulcan Academy of Sciences."

Gisa sighed. "I'm afraid I haven't time for that, Ambassador. I've more... pressing matters to attend to." Her gaze turned inward and for a second she looked infinitely sad. "I did not find what I was looking for," she added, more to herself than to Sarek. "Not this time."

Sarek studied her for an instant, intrigued, but then Amanda came up to him, smiling, and Sarek was diverted. He reached out to her, touching two fingers with Amanda's and sharing a look with her that excluded everyone else around.

"Oh, my husband!" Amanda breathed softly, "There were moments when I thought he would kill you."

"I deeply regret that you had to go through any of that ordeal, my wife," he told her gently. Regardless of the fact that there were people watching Sarek then took both her hands and held them gently and warmly in his own.

Kirk, however, was swift to notice that the Vulcan and his wife wished to be alone, and quickly ushered everyone else down the mountain pass to leave Sarek and Amanda standing alone together.

At last Amanda was able to wrap her arms around her husband's waist.

She sighed with deep contentment as she snuggled against him. "Oh-h-h, thank heavens it's all over," she sighed. "I really thought that Jamie was going to kill me, then when you turned up, I feared he might kill you." Closing her eyes, Amanda added, "Oh, Sarek, I don't want to go through anything like that ever again."

"You will not have to, my wife, I promise," he murmured, lowering his face to her hair.

Suddenly Amanda felt the cold, sharp touch of wetness upon her face, and for a moment she wondered if Sarek was crying, but *No*, she thought, *that's not possible*. Then she realised what it was.

It was a raindrop. A raindrop!

"Oh, Sarek, look! It's starting to rain!" she exclaimed in delighted wonder.

"We are in the mountains, my wife," his deep, rich voice told her, "Naturally we will feel the rain here whereas we would not in the city."

"Oh Sarek! It's beautiful!" she cried, and moments later it began to rain properly, coming down much harder and faster. "Oh, it's wonderful! It's marvellous!" Amanda exclaimed and all at once she was laughing and crying both together, hugging her husband round the waist and laughing at his wryly amused face. They were both getting soaked, but that didn't matter.

"But did you not expect this, my wife?" he teased, "You knew, after all, that the time of the rains was not far off."

"Yes, but I still didn't expect it to come this soon," Amanda said, her eyes laughing into his. And now, abruptly, she couldn't contain her joy or her emotions any longer. Smiling tenderly

up at him, she murmured with exquisite softness, "I love you, Sarek of Vulcan."

"I cherish thee," Sarek responded, using a Vulcan word with many, deeper levels of meaning. And whilst the rain soaked them both in the mountain pass,

Sarek gathered his wife into his arms and kissed her properly, fully and deeply, and now what had gone before no longer mattered to Amanda. All that was important was that her husband held her and kissed her with such passion and tenderness at this time of the rains.



MERCY'S ERRAND

A boundary line that someone will draw
Is enough to start a war.
An argument begins with conflicting interest,
The battle begins to see who is best.

Blowing up ships, it's cause and effect;
Defeat or victory, what happens next?
The war is unwanted, the outlook is bleak.
The brave must suffer to save the meek.

Vulcan nerve pinch, guard takes a nap,
Valiant effort, but caught in Kor's trap.
Disruptor blast, mindsifter beep -
Where is the challenge in killing sheep?

Intervention by higher beings,
Calmer deportment with clearer seeing.
Consternation - "This is our game!"
The squalling two are both to blame.

The fighting continues with searing heat,
No victory, for both sides only defeat.
Kirk says, "Let's stop a minute." The fighting ends.
"One day," proclaims Aylebourne, "both sides will be friends."

M. Sadler



AXANAR

by

Alex Blakeney

In a way, thought Doctor McCoy, it was a shame to use it after all this time. Given the events of the last few days, he didn't really feel he had much choice, it was just that he'd been saving it up for so long he was reluctant to be left without it.

He glanced across the table. The semi-regular, semi-formal, just-about-monthly dinner for the Captain and the Command Crew was drifting to a comfortable conclusion. Sulu and Spock were discussing some plant or other that Sulu had picked up; Scotty and Uhura were having an amiable argument about the merits of Anna Trepsi, the latest singing sensation, and Jim was listening to Chekov describe his last home leave. The little Russian was waxing lyrical on the beauties of the steppes in winter and only an expert Kirk-watcher could have told that the Captain's attention was light years away. Given that and the white line round his mouth, the tension in his shoulders and the way he had jumped out of his skin when Yeoman Osawa dropped the coffee pot, McCoy reckoned that something pretty bad must have happened on Eblus II.

He'd tried to get Kirk down to Sickbay as soon as he'd seen him on the surface but had been fobbed off with the old 'just a few bruises' routine. He had to admit that, physically at least, Kirk had seemed fine after a couple of days. It was the rest of him that he was worried about - if Kirk wasn't prepared to talk about what had happened it usually meant that he needed to.

McCoy thought he knew, at least in part, what the trouble was. Kirk had

always admired Garth, had studied his tactics and his theories of command, and finding the man a raving megalomaniac must have come as a nasty shock; however, there had to be more to it than that. In McCoy's experience that quiet stillness was usually a sign that Kirk had been brought up against his own vulnerability again and was not dealing with it at all well. He had no grounds for a formal medical order to the Captain to present himself for a physical- indeed he was quite prepared to forgo any actual examination; he just wanted to trap his friend in Sickbay and needle him into spilling his guts.

One last try, he thought, and if it doesn't work I'll wheel out the big gun while everybody's here and he can't escape. He took a deep breath and leaned over the table. "You're looking a mite peaked, Jim. Why don't you drop into Sickbay tomorrow and I'll give you the once-over."

The Captain was neither fooled nor amused. "Leave me alone, Bones," he said, his tone light but definite. "I'm fine."

Oh well, here goes nuthin', thought McCoy. He looked down at his fingernails. "I was talking to Nurse Medina to-day," he said, his voice studiously casual. "She tells me the ship's choir hasn't chosen its programme for the next concert. I thought of making a suggestion..."

"You wouldn't!" The protest was half-laughing, half appalled - Kirk obviously understood what the Doctor was talking about and equally obviously wished he didn't.

"Try me !" replied McCoy firmly. There was a pause during which the Captain shot the Doctor a look of not wholly serious but not wholly simulated betrayal.

"What time tomorrow?" The capitulation was so sudden that McCoy was almost caught unprepared.

"My office, 0900 hours."

Kirk nodded, got to his feet and half-bowed in the direction of his crew. "Thank you all for your company. I think I'll turn in now. Good-night." And he was gone, leaving behind him an open-mouthed and fascinated Bridge crew.

As soon as the door closed behind him they descended on McCoy, demanding to know what on earth 'that' was all about?

McCoy grinned. He might as well tell them because there was no way Jim was going to let him get away with it twice. "That, my friends," he said impressively, "was a demonstration of my secret weapon - the only thing in the known universe that embarrasses James T Kirk." He paused to screw their anticipation up another notch before announcing grandly, "The Axanar Cantata."

There was a moment's silence and then Uhura started to laugh. "Ooh, that's mean, Doctor," she said. "It's just the sort of thing he'd really hate !"

"Will someone kindly tell me whit you two are blethering about," demanded Mr Scott, voicing the curiosity of everyone else in the room. Even Spock seemed prepared to stay and hear the story and McCoy had half expected him to have left by now, declining to waste any more time in what he still, after all these years, tended to describe as

'unproductive social interaction'.

The Doctor settled back to tell the tale. "You all know about the Axanar Peace Mission?"

There was a mixture of nods and shaking heads.

McCoy sighed. "I sometimes wonder what they teach you kids at the Academy these days," and ducked as Uhura threw her napkin at him.

"Okay, let's start with the background. On the one side we have the Fellac - they were Federation allied - and on the other the Teratinoi, who weren't. Now Garth of Izar successfully whipped the Teratinoi invasion armada but the Federation weren't prepared to assist in no reprisal invasions and offered to mediate in peace talks. They were fighting over Axanar, the third planet in the system, which surveys by both sides said was jam-packed with valuable minerals. After the Peace Mission they divided up the planet peacefully and the Teratinoi joined the Federation."

"Well, after peace was declared and every one settled down for some serious celebratin', Teratin's leading composer wrote 'The Axanar Cantata'. Now, I'm no expert but I've always rather liked it - it's sorta catchy. The choir represents the people of both planets and it has parts for all the main protagonists: the chief negotiators for either side; the heads of state; the Federation ambassadors; and one Ensign James T Kirk. Unfortunately for our dear Captain his part is written for a very high tenor and the words are excruciatin'ly embarrassing."

He glanced at Uhura who laughed and obligingly sang, in a high-pitched, reedy tone,

"I am the youth who laughs at death
But rather far would laugh and

live."

"Good grief!" said Sulu into the stunned silence that followed. "Is it all like that?"

"Some of it's worse," Uhura assured them.

"While music is a highly developed art form on Teratin, their poetry rarely transcends the level of doggerel." This contribution from Mr Spock came as something of a shock to the rest of them, who had forgotten he was there.

Chekov was frowning. "I do not understand," he said doggedly. "Vhy vos the Keptin written into the Cantata in the first place?"

McCoy sighed. "Well, that's a long story..." he began.

Scotty pushed the decanter in his direction. "The night is young, Doctor," he said, "and if ye think ye're getting out of this room afore ye've told the story ye've another think coming!"

Not really reluctant, McCoy poured himself another glass of the bright green liquor and settled down to indulge them. "Okay, okay, I give in," he said, comfortably. "So long as Spock promises not to keep interruptin' when I'm a bit out with the dates."

Mr Spock, rightly diagnosing that this was a mere rhetorical flourish, said nothing and they all sat back expectantly.

"The time is 15 years ago and Ensign James T Kirk is on his first real posting, the USS Republic, which has been detailed to transport the Federation ambassadors to the peace talks which are going to take place on Axanar itself. The two sides have been at war for sixty years and for the first time in decades they seem

ready to at least consider peace.

"Now as we all know, newly-appointed Ensigns are the lowest form of animal life on a Starship" - Chekov grinned, unoffended - "rankin' somewhere below the ship's cat and the bacteria in the re-cyc vats, so young Jim gets assigned the job of liaison with the diplomats.

"You have to remember that this is the first time diplomats have ever gone on a mission like this and nobody quite knows what to expect and, worst of all, nobody has worked out the lines of command, so there's a lot of jockeying for position and general touchiness. Jim-boy has a devil's own job keeping 'em all happy and out of the path of Captain Halberson, which is absolutely essential because the man has a hair-trigger temper and a tongue that could skin a Gorn at fifty paces.

"Well, they get to Axanar and, just when he thinks he's going to be rid of the blasted delegates, Halberson says he's seconding him to the Security detail that's going planetside to look after them. Being a well brought-up, not to mention disgustin'ly ambitious, boy he doesn't tell the Captain to stick his job where an optical sensor don't scan; instead he goes back to his little cabin to polish his measly scrap of braid and dream of the day when he'll be The Captain and can make other people do the lousy jobs."

Uhura wagged a finger at him, "You've told this story before," she accused.

"Listen, if you knew a story this good - you'd use it too," retorted the Doctor. "Where was I? Oh yeah - Axanar." He paused, a little embarrassed. "Look, I know I'm making a big joke out of this but it was hellish serious at the time. The two sides had more or less

fought themselves to a standstill, millions were dead, cities laid waste and the environment on both planets inches away from being permanently ruined. They were all exhausted but they'd been fighting s'long and lost s'much they couldn't just stop, because that'd mean it'd all been for nothing.

"The peace talks take place on a volcanic island so barren and worthless nobody cares what happens to it. They build a huge 'Hall of Concorde' which is blast-proof, phaser-proof, disruptor-proof, in fact just-about-any-damn-thing-you-care-to-mention-proof and assemble for the talks. Nearly a hundred people, most of whom hate each other's guts, left on an island millions of miles away from anywhere civilised, where the weather is always lousy and the wind is so strong it rains right to left.

"Jim soon realises that he's only bene brought along to make up the numbers. Literally, because the Fellac had insisted on exact parity between the parties. There's nothing for him to do and the Republic's Security Chief soon makes it plain he'd better go and do it someplace else. After a bit he also realises he's not the only bored kid on the block; altogether there's half a dozen of them. Some general's son, a negotiator's daughter, a coupla of minor members of the respective royal houses to act as hostages, that sort of thing. None of the bigwigs have time for them so eventually they get together, Jim produces a pack of cards and they spend their time playing poker for pebbles - just about the only thing the island has plenty of.

"Now, there's a limit to the number of 'My name's Jim, I'm an officer with Starfleet - my name's something unpronounceable, my mother is Supreme Potentate of the Western Desert' sort of conversations they can have, they've got absolutely nothing in common and they

daredn't talk politics, so they tell each other stories."

Chekov sniggered and McCoy pretended to be offended. "Nothing of the sort, you filthy-minded young Cossack - these are all serious young people. They tell each other folk stories. Jim tells 'em about Robin Hood and, for all I know, Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Sehlat and the Fellac and Teratinoi tell him their stories. It turns out that one of the girls, a princess no less, is training to be an ethnologist and she gets all excited when they realise that the kids from both sides know a lot of the same stories, especially a whole bunch of stuff about their version of Brer Rabbit, which they reckon proves that they probably have a common racial origin."

"This is something they *can* talk about and for the next couple of days the kids tell each other more and more stories and realise that they're not so different after all. In fact one Fellac boy gets very friendly indeed with a girl from Teratin and all is peace and harmony between the kids, in direct contrast to what's going on in the Hall of Concorde where the grown-ups are at each others' throats, metaphor'cally if not literally."

He paused and scratched his head. "Before I go any further I'd better give you an idea of the set-up of the talks - you'll see why in a minute. You have to realise that the reason the Hall of Concorde was built so strongly was because not everybody on either side was too happy about the peace talks. Everybody is worried about possible sabotage or assassination or just an outright attack and the Security efforts have to balance that against the equally strong fear of bein' seen to be knucklin' down under Federation pressure.

"Anyway, the Hall is built to resemble the sort of meetin' place they

have on both planets, a square building underground with a pyramid on top going up to a central gap at the top, like a smoke hole in a tepee, and of course there's a force field over the whole thing. The delegates meet behind locked doors in the Hall itself, Security guards, drawn from all parties, are posted in an entirely separate gallery that runs right round the building and they too are sealed off from the outside world. The guards can't get at the delegates until the delegates open the doors to the Central Hall and nobody from outside can get at the guards until they open their doors to the open air. The Republic withdraws to the edge of the system, close enough to get their people out if things go badly, not so close that they look like they're loomin' over the talks.

"Well they talk and they talk and then one day, quite suddenly, after almost three weeks of hot air and arm wavin', it looks like they might be gettin' somewhere. The Fellac make a concession, the Teratinoi match it and by the time they break for the night everybody is startin' to feel hopeful. They reconvene next morning, lock both sets of doors and settle down for some real hard talking.

"Meanwhile outside, Jim has found out that it's one kid's Naming Day, which is what they celebrate on his planet instead of birthdays. He tells the others and they've all got little presents for the boy. They haven't got much choice of gift, being stuck on the island, so what they give has to come out of their own, personal stuff. Jim gives him the pocket 2-D chess set he knew the kid had his eye on, that sorta thing. The two girls, one from the Fellac, one from the Teratinoi, give him a sort of necklace for his ID tags they've both plaited out of their own hair; sounds a tad unhygienic to me but apparently it's a real big deal on both planets. The birthday boy stares at them

all dumbfounded and then he bursts into tears."

"Which is when the really bad news comes out. The kid is here with his uncle, one of the military types attached to the Fellac mission, and this uncle don't want peace at this or any other price. He still thinks his side can win. In fact he's so unhappy about the way things are goin' he's smuggled a weapon into the chamber and, if it looks like peace is about to break out, he's gonna start blastin'. He knows that if he can break up the talks chances are they'll never start again.

"Of course the Hall had all the usual sensing equipment; if he drew a phaser or any other known weapon he'd be isolated by a security field, which is where he'd been s'dam' clever. He's got hold of one of those ancient projectile weapons, like the ones Sulu is so fond of, which the sensors won't recognise. Then he's dismantled it into its component tubes and disguised them and the ammunition as part of the jewellery that nearly all the Fellac were wearing and which went in for lots of short, jangly bits of silver-coloured metalwork."

"So now what do the kids do? They can't get into the Hall because of the locked doors; they can't even use Jim's communicator because, as part of the security measures, all personal communicators have been confiscated so that nobody can make unofficial broadcasts. The only comms rig is the big central one and that's in the gallery with the Redshirts."

"Did the guards have no sensors?" Scott asked.

"Yeah, but neither technology was up to much and nobody liked to offend them by bringing down ours. It was good enough to show a beach landing and that was all they cared about - the sensors

showed half a dozen kids and the catering and support staff - exactly what was supposed to be there."

"So Jim sets himself furiously to think, as old Admiral DuPlessis used to say, and he thinks about the roof. There's a force field over it but it doesn't lie flat to the surface. There's a gap of about half a metre between the field and the pyramid, I s'pose that's so any movement in the field won't affect the structure. The kids dig down in the pebbles with their bare hands and find the edge where the field gets weaker and they literally ram Jim straight through it. Now the first idea is that he's just going to shout up and try to get the attention of the people inside, but that soon proves to be a bust. The force field, which is coming from inside the building, just absorbs the sound waves like any other vibration.

"The pyramid is made up of big rough blocks of the local grit stone, and Jim soon realises he's going to have to climb up to the smoke hole thing at the top and shout the warnin' down from there. Remember he's only got half a metre headroom, possibly less, and no equipment at all. He starts up the wall, and because he's being constantly repulsed by the force field, he gets jammed up against the stonework, which is pretty abrasive. After a bit his shirt's in tatters, his pants are out at the knees and he's leaving a long, bloody smear up the side of the building.

"Of course, if you ask him about it now he says he never noticed, 'cause he was too busy worrying he wouldn't make it on time and I suppose it might even be true - far be it from me to discount the effects of adrenalin, especially on a 20-year-old kid who thinks he's on a mission to save an entire star system.

"Mind you, I don't know about you folks, but when I was that age I too was

packed full of hormones and 'do or die', but I don't reckon I'd 've had the guts to do what he did.

"You see when he gets to the hole at the top there's a sort of lip poking up round it. The only way he can get up and over it to shout down is by sliding over it sideways, without being able to see what's below. So he gets one leg, arm and shoulder over and looks down, hangin' from the other arm and leg. Nobody below has realised what's going on, they're too intent on the negotiations, and the thickness of the walls has covered the noise of his climb."

"So he looks down and spots the Wicked Uncle screwing his necklace into a duellin' pistol or some such. The assembled negotiators haven't noticed because they're too busy slapping each other on the back and generally lookin' pleased with themselves. Jim shouts down a warning and they all look up and start screeching and waving their arms about and someone dashes to unlock the door to get the Redshirts. Not only haven't they understood what he just yelled but now he runs the risk of being shot by his own side.

"There's a sort of light fitting hung on thick chains from the ceiling below where he is; he swings himself down by his hands, wraps his legs round one of the chains and shinnies down 'til he gets to a big circular ring of lamps. Then he stands on the ring and shouts down that General Whosit's gotta gun. This time they hear and spin round to look at the fella, who completely loses his head and starts blazin'. The peace talkers dive under the furniture, the door to the security gallery is still locked," McCoy took a deep breath, "so Jim jumps him from about forty feet up. According to the story, he yells "Geronimo" as he comes down."

Scott whistled. "It's a wonder he

didna' break his neck."

"Oh, he did," replied the Doctor, with cheerful, medical brutality. "Also his collarbone, his pelvis, both legs and his left arm in three different places." He grinned at them sardonically, "Why do you think he calls me Bones? I was number two medic on the Republic at the time and he spent an entire week in a Total Immobilisation Field while we rebuilt most of his skeleton, including his spinal column."

He took another swig from his glass and looked down pensively, when he started to speak again his voice was quiet and meditative. "That was the first time I met him. He was only a kid and I can see him now, flat on his back, face as white as a sheet with these enormous eyes staring up at the ceiling. The damage was so severe we didn't know for almost a week whether he'd walk again and on top of that he reacted badly when we had to tell him the General was dead. I think it was the first time he'd ever killed anybody. Nobody likes it, but to a certain extent he's hardened himself to it now - back then he was cut up as only an idealistic kid can be.

"Anyway, it didn't take me long to realise here was a kid who was gonna be somebody; y'know, a man to be reckoned with." McCoy shrugged awkwardly, unsure how to put his thoughts into words, unwilling to reveal the emotions the memories stirred up. Eventually he settled for, "There was just something about the way he behaved in the T.I. Field.

"He lay there for six days with all that on his mind, never complaining, jokin' with the nurses and being gracious and sorta respectfully amusin' and ..well, gentlemanly, as a whole horde of ambassadors and heads of state and royalty and Starfleet brass filed into

Sickbay and presented him with medals and titles which he didn't want but Starfleet said he hadta accept 'cause it was good for interstellar relations. He was even made Honorary Commander of the Inter-Planetary Peace Force with a Ruritanian uniform he promptly gave to his mom, on the grounds that, if he was in space and the uniform was on Earth, nobody could ever make him wear it. I think the only thing that pleased him was his promotion to Lieutenant.

"And of course there was the Cantata. I've got a copy in my quarters if anyone wants to hear it, but if he finds out, for heaven's sake don't tell him you got it from me. If you do listen to it you'd better watch out 'cause it's real catchy, and if you hum it anywhere near the Captain you're liable to find yourself cleanin' out the shuttle bay with a toothbrush."

There was a long silence as they all considered the story. Spock, in particular, realised that he had just received the solution to a mystery that had been mildly intriguing him for years. His eidetic recall presented him with a memory. Himself, Lieutenant (j.g.) Spock, in the Civilian Arrivals Hall of Starbase 3, waiting to meet Professor Devi, watching a newsnet broadcast on an overhead Tri-V monitor in an effort to distract himself from the press of tired, grubby and irritable humanity.

The hall had been so noisy even he could not make out the spoken words, but the pictures were vivid then as they were even now, fifteen years later. The camera panning over a line of satisfied faces; scenes of people bowing and shaking hands; humanoids of a type he did not recognise dancing in the streets and a close-up of a very young man, gravely, but not self-importantly dignified, fair head rising proud over a gaudy blue and gold uniform, claiming

his right to be counted among those who make a difference. Spock had wondered what the story behind that image was.

Chekov, however, still had a question. With the persistence that was half his value as an officer he asked, "So why does the Cantata say he laughs at death?"

The Doctor began to giggle and Mr Scott, diagnosing his condition with an expert eye, moved the decanter out of his reach. McCoy looked at him reproachfully but decided to finish the story anyway. "Oh yeah, now this is the bit even I don't believe and I've never dared asked Jim about it.

"After the jump he's lyin' out cold

on a heap of wrecked furniture and the Security corpsman pumps him full of painkillers and selective neuro-paralyser so he doesn't shift around and make things worse while they wait for the Republic to get back. After a bit Jim comes to and asks what happened. Well, they don't want to tell him he's broken his back, so they tell him he's been shot. He giggles like an idiot and says, 'I've been shot by a silver bullet - does that mean I'm a were-wolf?' Then he starts to laugh so hard the corpsman gets worried and gives him another hypo. Legend has it, as he starts to go under he shouts out,

'I could have told him there was no need to worry. I used to be a were-wolf but I'm all right nooOOOW !'



A MESSAGE FROM KOLLOS

It's strange; you Humans talk about the loneliness of space,
But I have found a greater loneliness deep within your race,
For in your body units, you can be lonely in a crowd.
Strange to think of loneliness with others standing round.
My people know companionship as we navigate the stars.
We link and join with others, there are no mental bars.
You claim we are not beautiful, our forms would drive you mad,
But I have found your loneliness almost twice as bad.
When I joined with the Vulcan officer I experienced your sights and sounds,
But your inner feelings of solitude really did astound.
I'll link in mind with my people and tell them of your cares,
And hope you find as great a way your hopes and joys to share.

Helen Connor



LOST TALES FROM THE KLINGON ARCHIVES

By Alan Boag

NUMBER ONE : AN ALIEN WIND

Nothing could stop a Klingon Assault Group. Once a goal had been set, nothing was allowed to stand in the way. Which explained the barely concealed fury driving them on to complete the repairs to their stricken ship and get back into space.

Captain Kang sat in the deserted observation room. It was his relaxation period but he was far from relaxed, despite the fine quality of the drink in his hand. His mission - the Empire's mission - had been interrupted by that accursed Federation Starship and its triply cursed Captain. He took a drink and derived a grim pleasure from imagining the terror and destruction he would wreak upon Kirk and the Enterprise if, no when, he got them in his power.

The soft swish of the door behind him interrupted his reverie. He turned his head to where his Science Officer stood waiting.

"Permission to enter, Captain?" asked Lieutenant Mara.

"Granted," said Kang.

As she walked across the room Kang added angrily, "My wife does not need my permission to enter my presence."

"The Klingon Code is clear, my husband. Permission is needed to enter the Captain's presence at all times. He may not be interrupted without it." She walked past the chair where her husband was seated and stood looking out of the long curved window. "How does it

appear, my husband? Has Kasst been able to make an estimate?"

Kang rose from his chair and joined her in looking out onto the alien world on which they had been forced to take refuge. He rested one hand lightly on her shoulder as he replied.

"It's not good. At least a month's work. Perhaps more. It depends on whether we can find any usable minerals on this god forsaken planet." He turned to face her with a murderous rage showing on his face. "I am humiliated, Mara; my honour has been brought low. I must have revenge."

"First, Kang," his wife said quietly, "we must have repairs."

She turned and moved a little closer to the window. Looking down she saw the advance party of the Pathfinder Legion already at work enlarging the clearing the ship had landed in, felling trees with disruptor rifles, preparing to set up camp.

"I abhor jungle worlds," she said at last.

"A jungle, a desert, what is the difference? We must get off this planet, complete our mission and wreak revenge on that damned Kirk and his damned Enterprise."

They watched in silence as the crew worked on. Methodically, working together as a well engineered machine, they were creating the camp which would allow temporary living space more

expansive than the cramped quarters of the ship.

Mara sighed softly. "Some day," she said, "we are going to come across something we can't handle."

Kang answered with a snort.

"Perhaps even here," she persisted, waving a mailed fist in the direction of the dense jungle that lay just outside the safe curve of the vision plate.

"That is defeatist talk, Mara" snapped Kang. "Nothing can stand in the way of a Klingon Assault Group. Not Romulans, not Vulcans, not the Federation. And certainly nothing we are likely to come up against in an out of the way hell-hole of a planet like this one. When we get off this planet we will show them. Then they will see." He slammed the clenched fist of one hand into the cupped palm of the other and glared at his wife as if daring her to disagree. When she made no reply, he grunted abruptly, turned back to the vision plate and glared equally fiercely at the world below him.

The ship had been brought down on the top of a low hill which formed a natural clearing in the jungle that surrounded it. The summit was covered with a harsh green grass sprinkled here and there with small clumps of exotic flowers. Below the hill a river flowed sluggishly, a broad expanse of grey water moving in a sleepy curve through the dense vine entangled forests. As far as the eye could see the jungle stretched away, a brooding darkness that even from behind the tinted quartz of the vision plate seemed to exude a musty smell of foreboding. There was no sign of life but it was out there. Kang knew instinctively that sentence, perhaps even intelligence, lurked out there in the buried pathways and tunnels of this great tree-land.

The Pathfinders had cleared the site and one Group was busy with the erection of the first of the temporary living quarters. Another was assembling the frame of what would soon become the science and engineering laboratories. There the major repairs to the ship would be worked on.

"Like that," continued Kang as if there had not been long minutes of uneasy silence since he last spoke. He gestured at the window. "See how we do things, we Klingon. No unnecessary risks but no opposition tolerated. We establish our goal. We establish a path to that goal. And like the warriors that we are we drive on to achieve that goal. For the glory of the Empire!"

Mara automatically straightened to attention and repeated the words. "For the glory of the Empire!" It was ritual slogan but still it sent a surge of adrenalin through the system. And then more quietly, as though unsure of her words, she added, "You are right, my husband and Captain. Nothing can stop us. We have our goal."

"Good," the Captain nodded, and raised his hand in a perfunctory salute. "Return to your duties, Mara. I will be in our cabin if I am needed."

In his cabin Kang scanned the computer for the early details of the planet that was to be his home for the next weeks and months. 'The Planet of Exile', he was already calling it in his mind.

Nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere, acceptable mix. Atmospheric pressure slightly higher than Klingon norm. Gravity also slightly high. Not good. That could slow work down as the crew had to put extra effort into even the simplest of jobs. Local temperature high, humidity high, also not good. Radiation nothing

unusual, well within acceptable parameters. Bacteria and viral life forms, as usual an abundance, most recognised and logged some still unidentified. All the usual precautions taken. Larger life forms in plenty. The vegetation, no doubt the very soil, would be crawling with unseen life and some of it would be dangerous. Still, caution was routine, no problem there.

There was a sharp rap on his cabin door. He called for entry and the door slid open. Commander Kagar of the Pathfinder Legion stepped into the room and snapped a salute. Kang did not rise and deliberately made his answering salute brief and cursory. There was no point in letting the fellow get ideas above his station by establishing any degree of equality where none existed. No matter his rank Kagar was a jumped-up soil-grubber in command of a Legion of disruptor-fodder. He could never aspire to equality with the commandant of a Klingon Battlecruiser. The Warrior did not acknowledge the Farmer.

"Reporting, sir," said Kagar.
"Ground crew ready, sir."

"Fine, Kagar, fine."

What was the matter with the fool? The ground crew was ready? The ground crew was *always* ready, that was their job. Indeed since it was a Legion advance party which was setting up the base camp it was obvious that the ground crew had already landed. Why then all this stiff formality? It was, he decided, in the nature of Kagar and his kind. The Klingon Pathfinder Legion, despite its rigid discipline and its ancient pride in its tradition of service to the Empire, was still nothing more than the pick and shovel squad clearing a path for the real elite, the Warrior Class. Yet that very discipline attracted the likes of Kagar. People who aspired beyond their reach,

who needed the constant reinforcement of the rule book to confirm that their work had worth. That their life had worth.

"Commander Kagar," said Kang, "can you imagine any circumstances that your Pathfinder Legion could not handle?"

Kagar's expression was a delight to observe. "I am afraid, Captain, that I do not understand your question."

Kang sighed. "I didn't think you would, Kagar, I didn't think you would. That will be all. You may go."

By nightfall the full workforce of the Legion had been deployed and the work of preparing the camp was well under way. A circle of alarm posts had been established round the ship to warn of intrusion from unwanted native life forms. A disruptor cannon had been used to clear the ground, creating a barren circle on the hill-top, extending the clearing till it was big enough to hold the temporary buildings which would soon appear. Hard radiation generators had taken up the task, pouring pure death into the soil. The toll had been terrific. In some spots the ground had literally heaved as dying life forms fought momentarily and fruitlessly to escape the cold death that cut them down. Huge batteries of lamps set the hilltop ablaze with light that was brighter than the day and the work went on. As yet no Klingon Warrior had set foot outside the ship.

Aboard ship dinner was being served in the observation lounge so that the ship's officers might view the activity outside. The entire officer contingent was present with the exception of Kagar, who habitually dined with the troops of his Legion. They were gathered in small groups by the viewing screen when Kang entered. No-one quite stood to attention, but the murmured conversations faded to

silence and a subtle atmosphere of formality pervaded the room.

"Good evening, Warriors and fellow Klingons," he said as he strode to his place at the head of the table. The Captain's arrival and his ritual greeting - ritual, since these days not every officer was automatically of the Warrior Class - was the signal for everyone to take up their places. As he sat down there was a scraping of drawn chairs all down the length of the table.

Kang clasped his gauntleted hands before him and lowered his brow to the armoured knuckle-flanges. It was the traditional attitude of the Warrior's Prayer Before Food, but even as he began to form the words he hesitated, halted. When words did come they were different from those he had pronounced by rote on a thousand, ten thousand, such occasions.

"For the glory of the Empire we dedicate our food that it may give us strength; that strength may give us wisdom; and wisdom, understanding."

He lifted his head and looked down the table. Some of the faces looking back at him had startled expressions. His wife, Mara, looked amused.

They wonder if I am cracking, he thought. They may be right. Wisdom? Understanding? These words did not belong in the Code of the Warrior. These were the words of weaklings, of scribes, of poets, not of Warriors. What had put them into his head?

The moment passed and soon the room was ringing with the commonplace clatter of plates, cutlery and goblets.

"This promises to be an interesting world," said Kaldera, the young Chief of the Biological Sciences Division. "Some of our sensors are picking up signs of what

could be intelligence."

Kang squinted at the biologist. "Are you sure?" he asked.

Kaldera nodded his head in a negative gesture. "Not sure, sir, no. The sensors took a bit of a battering in the cra... the landing, sir, and we were only trying them out to test how much reserve power we had. Whatever it was we picked up it was at the edge of our range. There was something there though, I am sure of that."

"We'll find out soon enough," grunted Kang. "Now that we're here on this accursed planet I want the place to be subject to a thorough survey. We might as well spend our time constructively. Find out if there's anything here the Empire can exploit."

Ferran, the Geology Chief, spoke up. "I've been considering those mountains to the west that we came over on our descent. They have the look of a relatively new formation. New mountains might be easier to mine. Easier and quicker to get at whatever's under there."

"Then that will be the direction of our first surveys," Kang answered and turned his attention to his plate and his goblet.

Kang sat at his console. The screen showed progress so far in their enforced survey. A grid map of the land mass was displayed with a small portion round the ship illustrated in detail. Some of the river and the mountains to the west were sketched in. The base was a pulsing dot at the centre of the detailed section. All the rest was blank.

As much information as was gathered during their enforced visit would be entered and some of the gaps would be filled. But only some. He would not be staying on this hell-hole of a planet one minute longer than he needed to. He was a Klingon Warrior, a Captain of the Imperial Battlefleet, not some dirt-grubbing map-maker. He looked up from his screen and swung his chair round so that he could see out over the base. Already it had lost some of the early rawness. Already it had the appearance of a Klingon village, and had the atmosphere of Klingon energy and efficiency.

To allow the Engineering Group to work more effectively the entire crew had been evacuated into temporary quarters in the camp. Administration units and labs had been set up, and while on board repairs progressed as fast as possible, in the camp the work of the survey went on.

Soil was being sampled and tested. The life-forms that swarmed in the jungle were being caught, isolated and brought into the laboratories for analysis and experiment. Vegetation was being scanned and logged in the smallest detail. Bore holes were being sunk deep into the ground and core samples extracted. It was all necessary, it was all useful, but it was a distraction. Something constructive to fill in the time while the real job was being done on the ship. Whiling away the time till the repairs were complete and the Warbird could get back to its true home... space. And once there the hunt would begin. Kirk would be made to pay for his arrogance once and for all.

He looked up from his reverie to find Mara at the door of his makeshift office, watching him, her mouth set in a quizzical expression.

"What is it, Mara?" he asked with a sudden weariness. "Why are you not

about your work?"

"I *am* about my work, husband mine," she replied, the effort to hold back some more biting comment visible on her face. She pulled back her shoulders and snapped to attention. "Captain, I beg leave to report that we have captured a native."

Kang sighed. His wife could deliver a reprimand even when giving her Captain the due respect of rank. He motioned in the direction of the second chair by his desk and Mara entered and sat down.

"One of the Scanner Groups confirmed the reading that Kaldera mentioned the other night. Definitely sentient, though we don't yet know how intelligent. They've picked one up and they're bringing it in. It's humanoid."

The native was humanoid, but it was not Human. Nor did it fit with the configuration of any other species Kang was aware of. It was a biped and single headed but the resemblance ended there. It was jet black and stick thin, with a smooth round head that looked heavier than anything the fragile neck could support. The eyes, set impossibly far apart, had a gleam in them, a light that spoke of intelligence.

Kang turned to the Biology Chief. "Report," he said tersely.

"We've run all the usual checks, sir," replied Kaldera. "I must say, the subject has shown a remarkable level of co-operation. It is almost as if it understood what we were trying to do and wanted to help us."

Kang tensed as he looked deep into the creature's eyes and saw the calm that

lay there. No trace of fear or excitement at meeting alien beings for the first time. He glanced away and saw crew members scattered all round the clearing. They were silent, tense as he was, waiting to see what happened next. Mara handed him the mouthpiece of the Klingon Universal Translator.

"Will this thing work?" the Captain asked doubtfully. "We've never seen this type before."

His wife shrugged her shoulders and spread her hands. "The Linguistic crew have been working on it since the native was picked up. They've been trying to equate his speech with objects, actions and the like. The computer has extrapolated from what we know and filled in as many of the gaps as possible to get close to a complete language. So it should work. This early in the process the vocabulary will be limited and there will be no way to express complex concepts. Still, you should be able to communicate with it."

"We are friendly," Kang spoke into the machine and bared his teeth in an approximation of a smile. "We mean you no harm. We wish only to repair our craft. Then we will leave."

The Translator emitted an unintelligible string of whistles and grunts and then fell silent. There was a pause, a long pause, while the creature seemed to consider what had been said to it. Then it spoke. Its words, even repeated through the Translator in broken Klingon, had about them an air of authority.

"You should not have come here."

"We are friendly," repeated Kang. "We mean you no harm."

"You will never leave," replied the

native flatly. "You should not have come here, but now that you have you will never leave this planet."

Mara laughed. "Very well, if you wish us to stay we will stay. For a while at least. There is much that we can teach you."

"You will never leave."

There was something so flat and matter-of-fact in the way the words were spoken that Kang felt a sudden chill. The native meant it, he realised. It meant every word. It was not being dramatic, but neither was it bluffing. It actually believed that the Klingon party would not leave, that they would die on this planet. Kang smiled slightly at such foolishness.

The native spoke again. "You will die here."

Kang's smile disappeared. This was absurd. He decided to try a little subterfuge.

"What do you mean by 'die'?" he asked.

The withering look with which the native humanoid surveyed the Klingon Captain needed no translation. Slowly, deliberately, it turned on its heels and began to walk towards the edge of the clearing.

"Let it go," commanded Kang as two of the Security Guards moved to intercept. On his command they stepped back to their stations. The native reached the perimeter of the camp and without looking back disappeared into the jungle. Kang dropped limply into his chair and looked at the ring of questioning faces that now surrounded him.

"You heard that?" he asked rhetorically. "It sentenced us to death. It

said we would never leave the planet. That we will die here."

"Strong words, Captain," said Mara lightly.

"Oh it meant them, Mara. It doesn't know, of course. It really believes it and its people can prevail against a Klingon Assault Group." His laugh was unconvincing even to himself.

It was an amusing idea, of course. The thought that a single naked humanoid could come unarmed into the camp of a Klingon Assault Group and announce that they were all doomed. Amusing that he should be so sure of himself. Yet not one of the group standing round the Klingon Captain was smiling.

"Captain!" exclaimed Kaldera. "You cannot take this... this thing seriously."

"We must take precautions, however," broke in Kagar. "They may be planning an attack."

"So we watch our backs," responded the Captain. "We are Klingons. We are more than a match for a bunch of savages with spears."

The work went on. Days passed. There was no attack. While the Engineering Squad under Lieutenant Kasst struggled with their repairs the planetary survey continued, seeking out anything that might be of interest to a future Klingon expedition. Maps were made and entered into the ship's computer. Iron and silicon were found in the western mountains with other metals deeper underground. Much of the vegetation and animal life was edible, although none of it seemed viable for

commercial exploitation. At least they had fresh food to eke out the synthetics in the ship's stores.

A village of the native creatures was found deep in the jungle. It was a circle of primitive huts and little else. The inhabitants were peaceful and seemed to pose no threat. Nevertheless, mindful of their previous encounter with the people of this planet, Kang decided to interrupt his supervision of the engineering work and lead a party into the village.

They entered the village cautiously, weapons at the ready, confident of their prowess but careful not to take any avoidable risk. They made no overtly aggressive gesture as they measured the strength of the potential foe. The natives sat in their doorways and watched as the Klingon party formed up in the centre of the circle formed by the simple huts. They did not speak and they barely moved. They simply watched as the Klingon squad marched to the open green in the centre of the village and drew up in tight ranks.

A table was erected and a chair placed on either side. Kang sat in one chair and motioned for the Klingon Universal Translator to be placed on the table. He picked up the handset and held it to his mouth. He looked round the huts for one which was larger or more grandly appointed than the others, something which would signify the dwelling of a local chieftain to whom he could address his message. He found nothing; each hut was much like its fellows, there was nothing to distinguish any of them. He shrugged his shoulders and spoke anyway.

"We mean you no harm, we come in peace. We would speak to your leaders." There was no response. He repeated the invitation, gesturing towards the empty chair, hoping his actions would convey

any meaning his words lacked. Still nothing happened. For a few minutes Kang sat silently, his impassive expression masking a growing impatience. At last he picked the handset up again, turned the volume control towards maximum and repeated his invitation. "We are Klingon, We would speak with you. We request that your chieftain speaks to us. We come in peace and mean you no harm."

The natives remained still, silently watching. No-one spoke, no-one moved. Kang sat for a few moments longer, then he shrugged, switched off the Translator and summoned his Security Chief.

"It's no use," he said. "It won't work. Go ahead with the survey. Take all the recordings you can of the village, the people, anything. But don't disturb them. I've said we come in peace and for the moment we will act as if that were true."

The Lieutenant saluted and turned to give instructions to his squad. Mara approached. Kang acknowledged her presence with a nod. "Comments, Mara?"

"A stray thought, Kang. An impossible notion, no doubt, but one to which my mind keeps returning."

"Tell me," said the Captain. "I have experience of your instincts in the past. If you are in error then the speaking of the thought may help make that error clear and free your mind of it for ever."

"Husband, the thought is this," she replied. "That they do not speak because they have nothing to say. That they have said to us all they have to say and will remain silent henceforth."

"As you say, a strange notion. But not necessarily a foolish one. There is something wrong here, Mara. I feel it in my bones. Notice that they do not appear

to have a single metal tool. I can see not a scrap of metal anywhere in this village. The cooking utensils, the tools are a mixture of stone, wood and bone. Yet they have a culture. Of sorts."

"And they have intelligence," added Mara. "Look at the way they watch us. Not afraid. Waiting. Waiting for what?"

Kang gave a non-committal grunt. "We are achieving nothing here. We will return to the ship." He glanced at the sky. "It begins to grow dark, what is the time?" He looked down at the time piece on his wrist-band. "My timepiece seems to have stopped. What time do you have?"

Mara glanced at her own wrist and let out an audible gasp "Husband, mine too has stopped."

It should have been trivial, no more than an inconvenience, yet both Klingons stood still and silent, each staring at a dead display screen. This was not trivial.

Kang barked a command. "Assemble." At once the Klingon Field Squadron fell into marching order. "We return to the ship. Immediately."

The column marched away. The natives sat in the entrances of their huts, silently watching them go.

Kang sat in silence in his office in the field camp at the base of the Starship. He could hear the sounds of the wind in the leaves of the surrounding trees, the calls, distant and near, of unidentified animals and birds. The mobile light source above his head swayed in the breeze, casting shadows this way and that. Close by him a Klingon warrior in full battle gear stood stiffly to attention,

disruptor rifle at the ready. Kang pushed with his fingers at the pile of debris on the table in front of him. Every timepiece in the entire crew's possession had been examined, taken apart, checked, re-assembled, checked again and taken apart again. There was no fault to be found.

Yet none of them worked.

Night had fallen hours before yet the work of the crew continued. Activity that was both frantic and furtive. Warriors moved in shadows, criss-crossing the pools of brightness from the banks of lights erected round the camp. Watching them, it came to Kang that they moved with a haunted sense of doom. Yet there was no doom to fear. And had there been, a Klingon Warrior would not fear it. He would challenge it, defeat it or die in the attempt. But this whatever it was, this had no direction, no starting point, no place to which one could point and say, "The enemy, the threat, lies that way."

Just one thing.

Timepieces no longer worked.

It was a small thing for which there was no doubt some simple explanation. Except that in space or on an alien planet nothing could safely be assumed to be simple. The chain of cause and effect, the mathematics of chance, could not be relied upon to be the same as they were on the Home World.

The Klingon Warrior leaves nothing to the dictates of chance.

Following that dictum he had ordered all field parties to be summoned back to base and had redoubled the Engineering Crew's efforts to prepare the ship for lift off. That done there was nothing he could do but wait.

It was nothing to panic over. A

Klingon Warrior did not panic. A Klingon Warrior remained calm in the face of a threat. Unless the berserker blood was on him; then he flew, heedless of danger, into the thick of the enemy, to conquer or to die. But here? Where the enemy? What the threat?

A footstep sounded behind him. He swung round. It was K'sson, his Communications Officer.

"What?"

"The outstations are not answering, sir," said K'sson. "My Group have been trying for the past hour but we've had no response."

Kang grunted. "Stay calm, K'sson, they will answer. Give them time. There will be some atmospheric disturbance to blame for this." As he spoke he wished he felt the confidence he had put into his voice. For a second a black formless terror rose from the depths of his mind but he quickly pressed it back out of conscious notice.

"Sit with me, K'sson," he said encouragingly. "We will have an ale together, then go back to the ship to see how things are coming along." As the Communications Officer took his seat, Kang punched the Command Panel of his replicator.

"Ale," he demanded. Nothing happened. "Ale," he demanded again, more loudly this time. The machine gave a rasping wheeze, disgorged a misshapen goblet half full of a dark purple fluid. Kang lifted it to his face and sniffed. With a roar of disgust he threw the goblet into a corner.

Feet hammered across the packed earth of the camp heading for his pavilion. Kang turned in the direction of the sound. It was Kasst, the Chief Engineer. He came to a halt in front of the

Captain; his hands, scarred and grimy from years of doing battle with reluctant engines, reached down and grabbed the edge of the desk, gripped tightly to keep himself steady. His grizzled face had the look of a Warrior at the end of his tether. "Captain, it's the ship. Sir, the ship..."

Kang nodded, almost idly. "I know, Lieutenant Kasst. The ship will not run."

The Chief Engineer gulped. "The bigger equipment is fine, sir. It's the smaller pieces, the fuel inject controls, the matter/anti-matter flow regulator, the..." His voice tailed off to silence as the Captain's words registered.

"You know?" he said. "How could you know?"

"I know," sighed Kang. "Ever since our encounter with that dog Kirk I have had a feeling in my water that things would turn out badly. I did not know in what way they would go wrong, but I knew." He was thinking. The natives had no metal. No sign of it anywhere in their village. Everything was made of wood, stone and bone. And yet they were clearly intelligent enough, civilised enough to have developed a metal technology. And there was metal here, great deposits in the Western mountains. Perhaps they had tried. Perhaps centuries ago they had fashioned metal tools and had them crumble to pieces in their hands after weeks or months.

A civilisation without metal. It was unthinkable. Take metal from the Klingon and the Way of the Warrior was impossible. Take metal away and they were planet-bound, with bare hands their only tools or weapons.

Mara came into the pavilion, walking quietly in the silence. "The radio is dead," she said. "The robots are dead. All so much scrap metal."

Kang nodded. "The finely fabricated equipment, the delicate electronic stuff, will go first. The computer is only still working because it has so many redundant circuits; eventually it will go too. Then the generators will fail and we'll have no light or power. Next the weapons will go and disruptor rifles will be no more than clubs. Then, eventually, it will all go. Everything."

"The native told us," Mara said, "when you first spoke to him. 'You will never leave.' He told us."

"And we didn't understand," said Kang. "We thought he was threatening us and we knew that his people were too small, too weak to be any threat to a Klingon Assault Group so we ignored him. And all the time he was not threatening us at all. Merely warning us." Kang made a gesture of hopelessness to his wife. "Well, Science Officer, what is it?"

"We don't know. We may never know, and if we do it won't help us. It's a microbe, or a virus, or some form of organism we haven't run across before. Something that attacks and eats processed metal. It doesn't seem to attack raw metal; if it did that sample of iron we mined would have been destroyed long before we found it. Or perhaps it was safe while it was in the ground and will now go the same way as all the rest. We simply do not know."

"It eats metal," said K'sson, "and we've just brought it its first full meal for many generations. Maybe in millions of years. How could it have survived? Without food how could it even have lived?"

"There is no way of knowing. It may be life but not as we know it. It could be just something in the atmosphere."

"But we tested the atmosphere," protested Kang. Even as he spoke however he recognised the folly of his words. They had tested the atmosphere, but how could they have tested for something they had no reason to believe even existed? Even a Klingon Assault Group was limited - limited by the boundaries of their knowledge, hemmed by the circle of their own experiences.

Kang rose, and crossing the floor kicked at a heap of metal that had once been a robot.

"You have your answer," he told his wife. "Remember the day we landed here.

You and I talked in the observation lounge."

Mara nodded. "I remember."

Suddenly Kang realised that the entire base was quiet. A gust of wind came out of the jungle and rustled the canvas of the pavilion. Now for the first time since they had landed he caught it in the wind. The smell of an alien world.

"Kirk," he muttered beneath his breath. "You have killed me. May your very soul be cursed for eternity. You have killed all of us."



THOUGHTS IN SILENCE KEPT

For years I have travelled silently in space,
Yet I can remember each encounter, each and every face.
My memories are detailed, this no-one will deny;
Every joy and sorrow, every truth and every lie,
These times I hold within me under legal seal -
Yet on important occasions my files I must reveal.

Once when called to testify I turned upon a friend,
But falsehoods can be overcome, and truth came in the end.
This tampering with my memories was revealed in a game of chess
Thanks to the Vulcan officer who knew me at my best.
My personality was changed, and let me call Kirk "Dear..."
He really didn't like *that*, he made it pretty clear.

Still, I've helped them with their problems, and to solve their many tasks,
I've recorded all their details, and answered all they asked.
There's even built within me a means for my destruction,
And they know that I'll obey even this last instruction.
My knowledge far outmatches my appearance and my size -
You see, I am the computer on board the Enterprise.



Helen Connor.

MIRROR, MIRROR REVISITED,

or,
'...OF ALL THE BARS IN ALL THE WORLDS...'

by

David Gallagher

They had just under two hours left of their three-day pass on Starbase 23, and they still had one more bar left to visit. It was hard to tell who was supporting who as they approached The Spaceman's Rest.

"Aye, this is it, Lenny-boy - the last pub on Starbase... Starbase... Where are we, anyway?" asked Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott, his Scottish accent thick with all the drink he'd put away over the last few days. If there was one thing - other than his beloved Enterprise and her engines - that Scotty took seriously, it was his drinking.

His friend and drinking partner, Dr Leonard McCoy, peered drunkenly at Scott through bloodshot eyes and belched contentedly. "C'mon then, Scotty, what are you waiting for? It's my round, and you promised that you'd try at least one mint julep before we're done."

"Och away, man, I dinna remember saying that! But ye're right about one thing - it is your round."

After one or two false starts the two friends managed to negotiate the old-fashioned revolving door and entered the bar. The first thing that struck them as they approached the counter was the decor. It was one of those pokey little

bars that had covered every available surface with mirrors to make the whole place look bigger.

They reached the counter, ordered their drinks, and found a quiet table in a corner and sat down before they fell down. They sat in silence for a time, both deep in thought, comfortable just to be in each other's company.

Presently Scotty glanced up, hoping to catch the barman's eye to order another round of drinks, when suddenly he spotted... them. He grabbed McCoy's arm, jogging him and causing him to spill half of his drink into his lap.

"Don't look now, Doctor," he said, "but can you see those two fellas sitting over there? They're the spitting image of us, man."

McCoy looked over to where the Engineer was pointing and said, "Son-of-a-gun, you're right, Scotty. Well, I think I'll go on over there and buy those guys a drink."

As the Doctor rose unsteadily to his feet, Scotty pulled him back down into his seat and hissed,

"Sit down, man, and save yer credits - one of them's coming over here!"



TO FLY AWAY

by

Pen Cramphorn

Everyone had come to see them. Offices were deserted, buildings empty. Mothers had brought their children into the streets. The old, the young, even those among the sick who could walk or crawl were there.

Everyone had known they were coming, had heard them calling, heard the stories, yearned to be with them. Now they were here. There were here. The sky was dark with them, blotting out the suns.

And then they spoke...

McCoy looked down at Kirk as the face of Admiral Grainger faded from the viewscreen.

"I don't like it, Jim," he told the Captain of the Enterprise. "Three planets with their inhabitants totally mad, or their brains a blank? What could do that?"

There was silence for a minute then Spock, the First Officer and Science Officer, stirred.

"Unknown, Doctor. But we are expected to find out." He looked across at Kirk and the Chief Medical Officer.

Kirk drew in a long breath. "And the sooner we get to Marlos 9 the better. Mr Sulu, lay in a course, warp five." He rose. "Lt Uhura, ask Mr Scott to meet us in the Briefing Room."

"Well, Mr Spock, for Mr Scott's

benefit could you outline the facts for us." Kirk rubbed his chin. "It won't hurt to go over them one more time anyway."

"Certainly, Captain," said Spock. He turned to his computer screen. "Three planets have been afflicted by what appears to be some sort of mystery virus. On Elonyi, Coridex and now Marlos 9, all the inhabitants have been found wandering the streets, vacant, sometimes talking in a garbled fashion. The brain scans taken on Elonyi and Coridex show slightly irregular brain wave patterns. Physically the patients are in normal health; that is to say, there is not one abnormal condition linking them. The one thing they have in common is that they are all settlers of humanoid or vulcanoid origin. Starfleet is sending a large medical team to the most recently afflicted planet, Marlos 9. They should arrive approximately 21 minutes after the Enterprise."

"Theories, Spock?" asked Kirk.

The Vulcan raised his eyebrows. "I hesitate to make any on so little information, Captain," he said slowly.

"Well, dammit, *something* must be causing it!" said McCoy in exasperation. "These people can't be going loony toons of their own volition!"

Spock looked with disapproval at the Doctor. "While I do not applaud your choice of language, Doctor, I must agree with you. Also, I do not believe I said there was no cause. I simply stated that I did not know what it was."

"Elonyi is verra close to the Neutral Zone," put in Chief Engineer Scott.

There was a brief silence. McCoy was the first to speak.

"You mean you think it's the Romulans?"

Scott spread his hands. "I'm just saying."

"I had wondered..." began Spock, then stopped.

"Yes?" Kirk prompted.

Spock paused for a moment and steepled his fingers. "I had wondered whether the phenomenon could be caused by a biologically engineered element."

The other three stared at him. "That's against the treaty," breathed Scott.

Spock raised an eyebrow. "That does not make it impossible, Mr Scott."

"How would they do it - theoretically?" Kirk mused. "There have been no sightings of Romulan ships around any of the planets."

"That we know of," put in Scott.

"It would have to be something airborne," said McCoy slowly. "That would be the only effective way to contaminate all the planets over such a distance. But the ramifications would be horrific."

He looked round the table at each of them in turn: Kirk, concerned and alert; Scotty, anger at the Romulans plain in his face; and Spock, outwardly as composed as ever but with a slight tell-tale tightening of the jaw muscles.]

Spock was the first to speak. "Medically speaking, then, it would be possible to spread such a virus over such a distance?"

McCoy looked at him and shrugged. "I can't say for absolute certain, Spock, but at a guess - yes." He stopped and frowned. "But then this is all pure guesswork."

Abruptly Kirk stood up. He placed his palms down on the table. "Guesswork or not, it's all we've got so far. Bones, when we get to the planet I want you to take that virologist you've got on loan - what's her name?"

"Lieutenant Susannah Clifford," McCoy told him. "Sure, Jim."

Sulu's voice came over the intercom. "Captain, we are approaching Marlos 9. We will be in orbit in five minutes."

Kirk straightened. "Thank you, Mr Sulu. Please have Lt Clifford meet us in the Transporter Room, wearing a field suit. Mr Scott, you have the con."

Down on the planet there were people everywhere, crouched on the ground, standing, staring into the sky. Most were silent, but some were muttering to themselves.

"My god," breathed McCoy through his field suit, "I've never see anything like this." He was visibly shaken. "What're we gonna do with them, Jim?"

Kirk licked his lips. "We don't have to do anything with them, Bones. The back-up team will be here shortly." He too was distressed by the sight. He reached out to put a hand on McCoy's shoulder, but the field suit hampered the

gesture. "Our top priority is to see if we can find out what did this to them."

"But Jim," said McCoy, "we can't just leave them."

"They won't be going anywhere, Doctor," put in Spock.

McCoy turned on him furiously. "How can you be so heartless, Spock? Supposing this had happened on Vulcan?"

Spock turned carefully expressionless eyes upon the physician. "I find the situation as disturbing as you do, Doctor. However an emotional outburst, much as it may alleviate your feelings, can do nothing to help these people. By carrying out the task we were sent for we may be able to save some other planets."

As McCoy broke from Spock's gaze and muttered something incomprehensible, Lt Clifford gave a cry. She had been scanning the area with her tricorder.

"Captain! I'm picking up an alien life form - not native to this planet." She frowned. "Not like any life form I've ever seen before."

They set off in the direction her tricorder indicated. As they turned away from the main thoroughfare Lt Clifford checked her tricorder. "Just down here," she said.

They turned behind a building and stopped in amazement. Lying on a patch of open ground was the body of a gigantic bird-like creature.

They stood staring for a moment then, moving as if compelled, Spock walked to the creature and snapping off his field suit placed his hands on the

bird's head, feeling for the pressure points. Kirk and Spock looked at one another in dismay.

"Will he be all right?" Clifford asked.

Kirk looked at her and shrugged. They were distracted by Spock's voice. It was pitched higher than usual, and his eyes snapped open. He stared blindly up into the sky.

McCoy shuddered as he thought of the people they has just seen. then Spock spoke.

"Never to see Avialleyn again. To die here. Never again to hear the Elders call. Never to see Avialleyn. To die here. To die here..."

He started to shake uncontrollably, and at the same time Kirk, McCoy and Clifford saw the bird trying to move its wings.

"I must be free!" shouted Spock. "The sleep flight! I must join the sleep flight. Help me! Help me! Help me!"

"Spock!" Kirk dashed forward and wrenched Spock's hands away from the creature's head. Spock fell back against the Captain, his eyes closing. Then they opened again, and the Vulcan pulled himself up, passing a hand over his face.

"Spock!" said Kirk again. "Are you all right?"

Spock stared at him for a moment, as if he had trouble focussing on him. Then he said, "Yes, Captain, I am unharmed. Your suits are unnecessary. The Kaikylin are the cause of the insanity, and your suits will not protect you."

"The Kaikylin?" said McCoy.

"There creatures," Spock told him.

muttered.

"Do you mean we're all going to go mad anyway?" asked Clifford fearfully.

"Not necessarily," Spock told them. He turned to Kirk. "Captain, if we do not help this Kaikylin, it will die."

"Good riddance!" muttered McCoy, snapping off his field suit.

Spock turned on him, eyes blazing. "You know nothing, Doctor! Where is your much-vaunted compassion now? To speak in terms you understand, if we do not save this creature, our chances of preventing universal insanity are practically nil."

McCoy stepped back from the intensity of Spock's gaze. "Well what do you expect me to do about it, Spock?" he blustered. "I'm a Doctor, not a veterinarian."

Spock took a step towards him, his hands clenched.

"Gentlemen!" Kirk grabbed Spock's arm. "Bones, run your scanner over it, for god's sake!"

McCoy slanted a glance up at Spock as he reached into his medikit. The Vulcan stared past him, his face like stone. McCoy walked over to the creature and scanned its inert form. He looked up.

"All I can find are some torn tendons along the right wing. I imagine that would be enough to immobilize it, although obviously, not knowing even the most basic information about its anatomy, I can't be too specific. I'm gonna give it a pain killer. My prescription would be plenty of rest until the tendons mend." He reached into his medikit. "Better give it a double dose," he

A few seconds after he had administered the medication the Kaikylin's eyes started to flicker, then slowly opened. It looked round at the group from the Enterprise. It opened its beak and began to speak.

Images of incredible beauty flooded through their minds. Cold clear air, and aromatic scent of moist leaves, purple mountain ranges capped with snow and sunlight. And woven indelibly into all of these feelings were the voices of the Elders, calling, relating the tales of their ancestors wheeling through the skies of Avialleyn; and the exile, the yearning, the sense of unbearable grief...

Slowly, slowly, like struggling though drug-induced sleep, Spock dragged his mind away and erected his mental shields. With leaden limbs he moved away from the others and reached for his communicator.

"SpocktoEnterprise," he gasped, the words running together as he spoke. "Fourtobeamup..."

Kirk opened his eyes very, very cautiously. He didn't know where he was; he wasn't even very sure *who* he was. He saw Spock's face looming over him anxiously.

"Spock," he said slowly, "what happened?"

He looked around and saw Sickbay, but superimposed over its walls was the vision of Avialleyn. It all came flooding back to him. He looked over at McCoy on the next bed. The Doctor's eyes were just opening, but in the bed beyond Susannah Clifford was still unconscious.

"Captain." Spock let out a breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding. "I'm sorry, Captain. I should have anticipated this."

"Spock," said Kirk, "when that bird sang - spoke - whatever - it was so beautiful I wanted to be there - I wanted to be one of them." He broke off. "Is that what happened to all those people?"

Spock nodded. "I have to go back down and talk to the creature, Captain."

Kirk didn't seem to hear him. He was looking over at McCoy and Clifford. "How are Bones and the Lieutenant?" he asked.

"I'm okay, Jim," said McCoy, rubbing his eyes. "I don't know about Susannah."

"She is heavily sedated," Spock told them gravely. "She was exhibiting the same behaviour as the inhabitants of Marlos 9. Apparently she believes herself to be a Kaikyllin, and wants to join the rest of the flock." He turned back to Kirk. "I have to go down to the planet and meld with the creature again, Captain," he repeated. "We have to know where they are going."

"But Spock - the danger to your mind," objected Kirk.

"Only if it speaks, Captain. If I begin the meld immediately I will be safe."

"I'm coming with you," said Kirk. "I had to break the meld last time. I'll wear ear plugs or something." He looked over at Clifford. "I'm not risking losing anyone else."

Scott put the two men down in the

exact area Spock had stipulated. Immediately the Vulcan began the meld. Kirk paced up and down, deafened by the plugs McCoy had fitted to his ears, anxiously watching Spock for signs of - well, he didn't know exactly what, just signs. He could see the Vulcan muttering, but could hear nothing.

He watched in fascination as one of Spock's elegant hands smoothed the bird's multi-coloured feathers. As he watched the bird's wings started to move, the movement at first jerky but becoming stronger, fluid, beautiful. He could sense strongly the pull from the creature's subconscious, experiencing again - but less strongly - the pungent aroma, the feel of the pure, cold air. He shook his head to clear the image.

Suddenly Spock broke the meld, and Kirk watched in awe as the Kaikyllin took flight, wheeled and circled above them, and came to land next to Spock's kneeling figure. Its great wing tip touched Spock's shoulder very, very softly.

As Kirk crossed to the Vulcan he turned his head. His eyes looked drugged, and he stared through Kirk.

"Spock!" said Kirk urgently. "Spock!" He touched Spock's shoulder, and leapt back as if he had been burned. The sense of... *otherness*... he had picked up from the bird was incredibly strong from Spock.

"Spock!" he said again.

The Vulcan swayed. His lips moved. Kirk thought Spock had been struck dumb, then he remembered the plugs in his ears. Tearing them out, he bent over his First Officer.

"Jim..." Spock said faintly.

Kirk crouched down beside him, but did not try to touch him. He was afraid he might be invaded by whatever was filling Spock's mind. He had a frightening mental picture of them both crouched on the ground like the demented inhabitants of the planet, minds lost forever.

Spock shook himself. He flexed his arms as the Kaikylin had done with its wings, and looked up at Kirk. "Captain, I am myself. And we have no time to lose."

He looked over at the Kaikylin, which was standing patiently, and made a strange noise deep in his throat. The creature responded, and once more took flight.

Kirk watched it. "Is it all right now, Spock?"

"Affirmative, Captain. And he has told me... all we need to know. Now I must calculate what action we must take."

He reached for his communicator, and a few seconds later the transporter beam took them up.

Half an hour later Spock was still working at his computer. He had given them no new information, only saying that he would do so when he could.

The Starfleet back-up team had evacuated the planet and were caring for the inhabitants. Kirk could not imagine what would happen to them; no-one had any idea of prognosis or treatment. He shuddered. To be trapped inside the mind of another, inside your own mind... He broke away from the chilling thought, and thought with concern of Lt Clifford.

Spock's voice roused him from his reverie. "Captain, I think I have the

information we need. Can we discuss this in the Briefing Room?"

Kirk pressed his intercom. "Mr Scott, Dr McCoy, please report to the Briefing Room." He looked up at Spock. "Mr Spock, we need you to be right. Desperately."

When they were all assembled in the Briefing Room Spock steepled his fingers and took a deep breath. His eyes were those of a man entering a hostile room and preparing to fight.

"These creatures, the Kaikylin, originate - as far as I can determine - from a small planet in the eastern arm of the Hetronii system. Hundreds of years ago they roamed their world without interference. Although they have no technology their hierarchical structure is immensely complex, as is their culture. Nothing is written down; everything they know and believe in is stored in their large brains, and passed down by word of mouth."

"Or in this case, beak," muttered McCoy.

Kirk glared at him, but Spock took no notice apart from making a small gesture very similar to swatting away a troublesome insect.

"About two hundred years ago, their planet was colonised."

"Wait a minute," McCoy interrupted again. "All the planets in that system have been colonised for at least a century. There have been no reports of oversized eagles roaming around driving the good folks crazy."

"That is because the 'good folks' who took over their planet immediately

began to kill them," said Spock witheringly. "There was no reason to do this. The Kaikyllin did not interfere with them in any way. Apparently the creatures' feathers were considered a trophy, and the flesh of their young a great delicacy."

He paused and looked round at the three men as if they were personally responsible. Even McCoy did not take up the challenge. Spock continued,

"The Kaikyllin retreated higher into the mountains and gradually began flying at higher altitudes for longer periods of time. Eventually, over many years, the colonists even took over the mountains. By this time, however, the Kaikyllin had developed the power of space flight."

There were expressions of disbelief from the others, particularly McCoy.

"That's impossible, Spock," Kirk said.

"Indeed it is not, Captain," Spock retorted. "When flying through space the Kaikyllin can put themselves into a state of self-induced hypnosis - a kind of hibernation, if you will. They only awaken when they arrive at a planet. The Kaikyllin I melded with called it 'sleep flight'. They have been searching all this time for an exact replica of their planet before it was colonised."

"Then why haven't more planets been affected, Mr Spock?" asked Scott.

"Because only humanoid or vulcanoid life-forms can hear on their frequency, Mr Scott. Some life-forms have a much higher or lower frequency band; indeed, some do not hear, in the sense that we understand it, at all. The Kaikyllin do not cause harm intentionally; they merely fly over the planets searching for a home - and calling

to one another." Spock stopped, obviously moved. "Captain, I think I have found them a planet."

"Well, hooray!" said McCoy. "Let's get them to it before they destroy half the life-forms in the galaxy."

Spock turned on him, his fury only partly mastered. "That would, of course, be your only reason for such an action, Doctor."

McCoy looked at him intently. "You really care about these birds, don't you?" he said finally.

Spock turned to Kirk, ignoring McCoy. "There is one problem, Captain. The planet I have found is just inside the Neutral Zone."

Kirk stared at him. "Brilliant, Spock. The whole universe, and you have to pick the Neutral Zone."

"Captain," said Spock, "it is the only uninhabited planet that even comes close to the Kaikyllin's description."

Kirk sighed. "Very well, Mr Spock. I'll speak to Starfleet Command and strongly suggest that it's in everyone's best interests to get these creatures settled - including the Romulans." He paused. "Wait a minute. Where are the rest of the flock?"

Spock looked down at his hands. "Flying towards Lameth 5."

"Lameth 5!" said Kirk. "We've got to stop them, Spock. Lameth 5 is intensely populated, and very important to the Federation -"

"Because of the minerals found there. I know, Captain," said Spock. "If Mr Scott can assist me in modifying the tractor beam, we can take the Kaikyllin

with us. I have explained our position to him, and promised his people a home..." here he paused and looked somewhat defiantly at Kirk "... if he contacts them as soon as they awake over Lameth 5 and prevents them from talking."

"Will he do that?" asked Kirk.

"Indeed, Captain. He was most willing to co-operate. The Kaikylin are an extremely intelligent race, a most fascinating mixture of extreme logic and deep romanticism."

McCoy gave Kirk a significant look. Kirk frowned at him.

"It may be," said Spock, half to himself, "that some day the Kaikylin may become valuable Federation members."

"Hmm," said Kirk. "Very well, Mr Spock, you and Scotty go and see what you can do with the tractor beam. I'll go and talk to Starfleet." He paused on the way out. "Bones, how is Lt Clifford?"

McCoy grimaced. "I just don't know, Jim. Sometimes she's lucid, but it seems like that bird has altered her entire brain pattern. Even when she is talking to us she goes on about the homeland, and how the Elders tell these great stories of long ago. According to her they know everything about everything."

Spock paused in the doorway just in front of Kirk and McCoy. "It is logical to assume that they would have amassed a great deal of information during their travels. It would be fascinating to tap that knowledge."

"Yeah, well, considering that knowledge seems to turn people into zombies, I'd prefer not to have access to it, personally," said McCoy. "Now if you'll excuse me, Spock, I'm gonna go run some more tests on Susannah in the

hope *my* knowledge can do something for her."

Two hours later they were in orbit around Lameth 5. Kirk had spent almost the entire time arguing the case for resettling the Kaikylin on the planet Spock had found. Just before their arrival at Lameth 5 Starfleet had informed him that the Romulans had agreed.

Kirk, sweating freely, gave the good news to Spock, who immediately beamed down to the planet to meld with the Kaikylin so that he could inform his people when they arrived.

Back on board the ship Spock told Kirk that the Kaikylin had guaranteed that his flock would stay over Lameth 5 just long enough to rest and feed, and would on no account speak or sing.

"What do they eat?" asked Kirk curiously.

"Mostly aquatic creatures, I believe," Spock answered distantly. "That was not relevant to our conversations."

Kirk managed to hide a smile. He was glad McCoy wasn't there to tease Spock about his 'perfect' creatures eating the flesh of other life-forms.

Much later, after the Kaikylin had finally departed for their new world, Kirk found Spock in the Observation Lounge gazing out into space. He went and stood silently by the Vulcan, awed as always by the vastness of the sky. After a few moments he glanced at Spock.

"I'm sure they'll be okay now, Spock."

"I hope you are right, Captain. I find it most disturbing that living creatures can be driven away from their home - or worse, made extinct - by the actions of another species."

"It happened a very long time ago," said Kirk soothingly.

Spock looked at him, his eyebrows raised. "Do you believe it does not still happen, Captain?" he asked.

"No, Spock," Kirk said finally, "but I wish I could."

"Indeed," said Spock heavily.

They were interrupted by McCoy's voice over the intercom.

"Jim! Wherever you and Spock are, get over to Sickbay. I've got something to show you." His voice was jubilant.

When Kirk and Spock arrived at Sickbay they were met by a grinning McCoy. He led them to Clifford's bedside. She was lying back against the pillows looking pale and tired, but her eyes were clear, alert.

"Lt Clifford!" said Kirk. "Good to have you back."

"It's good to be back, Captain," she said, smiling up at him. "But I'll never forget." Her smile faded. "It was all so beautiful."

"It will be again," Kirk assured her.

"And that's not all, folks," said McCoy. "I've heard from Starfleet - all the inhabitants of the three planets are back to normal, too!"

Susannah Clifford smiled. "That's such good news. But you know, the creatures didn't mean any harm. They

were driven from their home," she told them, unaware that they knew the whole story. "If only people - all species, I mean - would consider their actions, not be intolerant and bigoted, the universe could be such a wonderful place."

"Ain't that the truth!" said McCoy.

"It most certainly is, Doctor," Spock said with heavy irony.

"Are you saying there's room for improvement around here, Spock?" McCoy inquired.

Spock raised his eyebrows and prepared to annihilate the physician. "Well, Doctor, since you mention it -"

"Unfortunately, gentlemen," Kirk said quickly, recognising the glint in his First Officer's eyes, not to mention the look on McCoy's face, "I'm afraid we don't have time for an interesting philosophical discussion. Mr Spock, I believe you have duties on the Bridge to attend to?"

Spock shot a barbed glance at McCoy, but turned and left Sickbay.

"As for you, Bones," Kirk turned on the smiling McCoy, "you're lucky I didn't let him demolish you."

McCoy just grinned more broadly. "You know Spock's problem, Jim? No sense of humour."

Kirk shook his head at him in disgust, and left the Doctor still chuckling to himself.

When he reached the Bridge Spock was bending over his computer. His back view, however, was eloquent of his sense of injustice. Kirk grinned, and was just settling himself in his chair when Uhura said in a puzzled voice,

"Captain, I'm picking up a message - but I'm not sure how. It's not being broadcast on any of the usual channels."

"Try it on visual, Lieutenant," Kirk told her.

The stars on the viewscreen dissolved to show what looked like a paradise. Snow-capped mountains, pine forests, soft blue sky. And in the forefront, mighty birds wheeled majestically in complicated flight patterns.

Spock had left his station and was

standing next to Kirk's chair. "Fascinating," he breathed.

"Pretty impressive for creatures without technology," agreed Kirk as the image faded from the screen. "What was that you said earlier, Spock? Valued members of the Federation?" He looked up at the Vulcan. "That day may come even sooner than we realised."

The Vulcan's eyes crinkled slightly at the corners - the closest to a smile Spock ever came. "Indeed, Captain," he said softly. "I never doubted it."



SPACE TRAVELLER

Windy breeze, waving trees,
Cool water travels down trickling streams.
A different world, a new-found girl.
They danced together in a whirl.

People yawn, a new day rises,
What would be this day's surprises?
Leaving her chamber, no way of returning,
Was this love, or his stomach's burning?

Shadows cast down their evil glare,
Filling all around with deep despair.
Finding him gone, tears welled in her eyes,
Her man now journeyed in faraway skies.

She wrote life's story down on a page;
Even the writing faded with age.
Her delicate body could never be mended,
In dark red pools her life now ended.

To the rest of his shipmates this went unspoken,
But for the rest of his life his heart was broken.



M. Sadler

MIND GAMES

by

Jean Sloan

Spock switched off the comm unit and sat back, looking thoughtful. A moment later James Kirk entered his F.O.'s cabin without buzzing.

"Spock, ready to resume our chess match?"

He flexed his fingers experimentally, as if flexible fingers would somehow help him win. The game was in its third evening; it had been hotly contested, so much so that the crew had started betting on the outcome. The pair had moved the game to Spock's cabin because they, or rather Jim Kirk, found the growing audience disturbing to the concentration.

"Indeed, Captain. I have been looking forward to the relaxation."

Kirk grinned as Spock set up the chess tower.

Though their games were not short of friendly rivalry this was, for James Kirk, one of the most relaxing parts of the day. He enjoyed the challenge of playing with Spock, never minded losing, and was ecstatic when he won. The concentration necessary made him forget the concerns of starship routine, totally relaxing his mind.

So it was that his mind was distracted from extricating himself from a very tricky situation by the bleep of the comm unit in Spock's cabin.

"I'm sorry, Captain. Please excuse me."

"Do you want me to leave, Spock?" He had noticed that the light at the base of the unit was flashing yellow, indicating a private message.

"No, Jim, that will not be necessary."

The head and shoulders of an elderly Vulcan male appeared on the screen.

"Stomack, I give you greeting." Spock raised his hand in the Vulcan salute, the gesture being returned by the Vulcan on the screen. "I honour you and T'Rea, who has become part of the All."

"I thank thee, Spock; and I wish that thee may assist at her passing to the Hall of Ancient Thought."

"I should be honoured to stand with thee, Stomack. When will the Ceremony of Passing be conducted?"

"In seven nights, when the Time of Meditation is past."

"I will be one with thee, Stomack, when the time dawns. May you find peace in meditation."

The figure on the screen inclined his head to Spock, then the transmission was terminated.

Jim Kirk, who had watched transfixed, now looked expectantly at Spock. The Vulcan sat down and paused to steeple his fingers before speaking.

"Jim, my aunt has died."

"I'm sorry, Spock."

"There is no need for sorrow. T'Rea died peacefully, of old age after a productive life; her Katra has been saved and is to pass to the Hall of Ancient Thought. As you heard, I must go to Vulcan for the ceremony. I am sorry if that causes any difficulty."

"Of course it doesn't. We're not due at Janus 4 for five days - plenty of time to divert to Vulcan." Kirk contacted Helm and Navigation to request the necessary course change.

"How long will you spend on Vulcan?"

"The ceremony of transference takes only hours. I will then require 24 hours rest."

"Rest?"

"Yes, Captain. I will meld with Stomack, who is the Keeper of the Katra, and help him to transfer the consciousness into a Globe of Eternity, where my aunt's Katra - the sum total of all her knowledge and wisdom - will rest, to be available to those who seek knowledge."

Kirk's brow creased slightly. "Will there be any danger to you?"

Spock's expression softened, signalling his appreciation of his Captain's concern. "The ceremony is tiring, Jim, as is any mind-meld - nothing more. My father is on Earth at a meeting at a meeting of the Federation Council. My mother will no doubt be at the ceremony. If my father had been on Vulcan, he would have been asked to stand with Stomack, not I; it is usually the closest relative of the Keeper of the Katra who officiates."

Kirk sighed. He disliked having his First Officer absent from the ship, but of course family came first.

"Do you still feel like playing chess after your bad news?"

"As I have already explained, Jim, there is no cause for regret. I would like to finish the game before I leave the ship."

Spock won.

Four days later Enterprise was nearing Janus 4. The assignment was to report on the progress of the mining colony and on the success of the alliance with the Horta. Kirk expected no problems. According to the grapevine not only was production up 200%, but a young Horta had made application to Starfleet Academy, and had been accepted. While the ship stopped over McCoy would give the miners physicals; he was also curious to collect some more information on the physiology of the Horta race. This project had been approved by Starfleet, particularly given the interest shown by the youth of the planet in space travel. Jim Kirk expected to be in orbit around Janus for 7 days. Allowing 3 days to return to Vulcan, that meant that it would be ten days before he was able to pick Spock up.

The Janus assignment passed without any hitch. The crew got some R & R, though most of them stayed on the ship - there were no recreational facilities on Janus. One day a group of young Hortas were brought aboard. They proved sociable and lively, voders having been developed to facilitate communication with other races. James T. Kirk privately thought that it would not be long before the youth of the world found

Janus limited and started to move outwards into the galaxy.

The Enterprise left for Vulcan on schedule. As soon as the ship had engaged warp drive the Captain asked Uhura to establish communications with Vulcan; he was anxious to make final arrangements for picking Spock up.

Sometime later Uhura spoke. "Captain, contact established with Vulcan Central."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Get them to patch me through to Spock's home - you have the comm identity code on record."

"Yes, Captain - complying."

"I'll take the call in my cabin, Uhura; Sulu, you have the con."

When Kirk entered his cabin the comm unit was buzzing. To his surprise, it was Sarek's face on the screen.

"Greetings, Ambassador." Kirk's voice indicated the question.

"Captain Kirk, I'm afraid that I have bad news for you."

Kirk's heart missed a beat. "Spock?"

"Yes, Captain. Something went wrong during the transference of T'Rea's Katra; both Spock and Stomack are in the hospital in a deep coma."

James Kirk felt the colour drain from his face. "What is the prognosis?"

"Not good, Captain. The Healers have tried all relevant treatments, without success. Yesterday they had to put Stomack on full life support. It is

expected that the same will be necessary for Spock within 48 hours. I am deeply sorry, Captain. I know of your - affection - for my son." This last was said with obvious difficulty.

"Sir, may I be permitted to see Spock, and may I bring my physician, Leonard McCoy?"

"Of course, Captain. If Doctor McCoy has any suggestions to offer, the Healers will no doubt give them every consideration."

As the image of Sarek faded Kirk realised that his fingers were hurting, he was gripping the arms of the chair so tightly. He tried to make himself relax, but he felt numb. He could not quite assimilate what he had just heard. He was due back on the Bridge. He left his cabin like an automaton and walked unseeing towards the turbolift.

"Hey, Jim, watch where you're..." The tinkle of glass signalled the destruction of the test tubes McCoy had been carrying, but the Doctor was not concerned with them now. He had caught the blank expression on Kirk's face. He grasped the Captain's arms. "Jim, what's wrong?"

"Oh! Bones!" Kirk seemed to snap out of his daze. "It... it's Spock. He's... dying." The last word was whispered.

"How? Why? C'mon, Jim, back to your cabin."

"No - I'm due on the Bridge."

"You're in no condition to go back on duty. Anyway, you've got to tell me what happened."

Back in his cabin Jim Kirk managed to repeat what little he knew more or less lucidly. The effort seemed to bring him

out of his shock a little.

"Bones, he said there was no danger. What went wrong?"

"How can I know, Jim; but if it's in my power to find out, I will do. However the Vulcan doctors are very experienced with affairs of the mind. They know much more than I do..."

The implication was left hanging in the air between them.

The next 2 days seemed like an eternity. The mood on the Bridge was sombre. Kirk's face was drawn and his eyes developed shadows. There was no chatter or gossip. As Vulcan grew large on the viewscreen, the tension grew.

Vulcan Spacedock was ready for the ship and coordinates for the hospital at Shikahr were provided without any red tape. Kirk assumed that Sarek had had a hand in that. He and McCoy materialised on the hospital forecourt where Sarek was waiting for them. He raised his hand in salute.

"Captain Kirk, Doctor. I regret that our meeting has to be under such circumstances. I am sure you would like to see Spock without delay."

"Yes please, sir. Is there any improvement?"

"There is no change, Captain. It has not yet been necessary to put him on life support - his body is holding its own. But his mind has gone - emptied of all it possessed."

In Kirk's view Sarek looked bleak. What he was describing was, for a Vulcan, much, much worse than the death of the body. It was the one thing in

all the universe that Spock had feared.

They were led through the featureless white corridors of the Vulcan hospital and into a small side ward. Spock lay covered only by a light sheet, his body illuminated by the yellow glow of heat lights, designed to keep the patient at the optimum temperature. His face was devoid of expression, colourless, holding lines and shadows that had not been there in life. That was how James Kirk instantly thought of it - a body devoid of life, of the substance that made the body a person.

"What happened?" he whispered. "What went wrong?"

"We cannot be certain, Captain. The minds of Spock and Stomack were simply drawn away."

"Or they withdrew deep into themselves." It was McCoy who had spoken.

"The Katra was lost too. This suggests removal rather than suppression."

McCoy made no further comment.

"Doctor, perhaps you would wish to speak to Spock's doctor. I am not qualified to answer your questions."

McCoy glanced sideways at Kirk, whose gaze was riveted on Spock, his eyes suspiciously bright. The Captain could use sometime alone. He turned to Sarek.

"Thank you, sir. I would be honoured."

Kirk had been holding his emotions in check, knowing that his sorrow would serve no useful purpose and unwilling to expose himself before Sarek; but as the door closed behind Sarek and McCoy, his

control slipped and his eyes misted.

"I am a Starship Captain," he whispered to himself. "I am not permitted this."

But his heart cried out irrationally to hear Spock's voice just once more. As this thought echoed in his brain, he caught his breath.

"Listen to me. I am accepting that he is gone, finished."

He took Spock's hand gently in his; it was warm, alive. Relief flooded him; he took a deep breath.

McCoy returned alone, his expression serious. "There's nothing to be done, Jim. The doctors..."

"Nonsense, Bones, since when have you ever given up on a sick man? Why are we being so defeatist about this?"

McCoy's eyes narrowed, then his expression changed. He said wonderingly, "You're right, Jim! I don't know what came over me. It's the Vulcans; they project such an aura of certainty that one tends to accept what they say without question."

"Exactly. They don't believe in hope. When all logical avenues have been tried and have failed, they give up. Let's try a little illogic. He's *going* to get better. He has to..."

McCoy went to work with his mediscanner.

"There is some brain activity, Jim, but it's at a very low level. Look, I want him on the Enterprise where I can have access to the equipment I need without having to explain why I want it. The Vulcans will waste time trying to persuade me not to waste my time."

"Agreed, Bones."

"Sarek has gone to fetch Amanda to see Spock. He'll be back soon."

In the event it was not difficult to get Spock moved to the Enterprise. Sarek was inclined to demur; it did not seem logical to him.

"My son is dying, Captain. Let him die peacefully among his own people. Nothing can be gained by moving him."

Amanda had been standing by Spock's bed looking down at the still form, as was Kirk. At Sarek's words her eyes met Jim Kirk's. She saw the pain there which, she knew, mirrored her own, and she also recognised Human will and determination. Her eyes flashed and she turned to face her husband. Only minutes later, Spock was in Enterprise Sickbay.

It was late in the evening; McCoy had fallen asleep in his office over the last batch of test results. Jim Kirk came in, just off duty, went to speak to McCoy, then thought better of it. Instead he went through to the side ward where the Vulcan lay. Spock looked as he had before, except that some tubes ran into his veins, a gentle stimulant, worth trying McCoy had said. The Doctor had worked indefatigably, but to no effect. Hope was failing. A short time ago word had come through that Stomack had died. However, Spock was still holding his own physically. He had not yet required full life support. In fact his vital signs had improved somewhat, as had his colour.

He might just be asleep, Kirk thought, touching Spock's face gently, a lump coming to his throat.

An idea came to him. Sitting on the edge of the bed he placed his hands

carefully on Spock's temples, and called to him in his mind. He knew that the Vulcan Healers had tried mind-meld techniques, but he also knew there was nothing to lose. He was not even sure that he was capable of initiating a meld; even though he had been linked with the Vulcan on many occasions, the initiative had always been Spock's.

He concentrated hard, until beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. For a second he thought he felt a little thrill of... something... but it was quickly gone, and might have been his imagination. Suddenly, his mind was flooded with an impression of dreadful emptiness. He gulped, overcome with sorrow and an overwhelming sense of loss. In desperation he lifted one of Spock's hands to his own temple and pressed it there, his lips forming the words in his mind.

Spock, you can't go. I won't let you. I've lost too many people I've loved - I won't lose you. Do you hear? I'm selfish. I want you here. How dare you desert me like this! You didn't even let me say goodbye. You lied to me - I would never have left you on Vulcan: I would have stayed, I would have stayed...

Giving up the meld, Jim Kirk clasped Spock's hand between his own and allowed despair to calm him. He did not notice the dark eyes open, focus, then regard him steadily, but he felt the hand that Spock reached out to touch his Captain's face gently. Kirk's heart missed a beat. Then he looked at Spock. He was incapable of speech. His hold on Spock's hand tightened convulsively, and he swallowed hard.

"Captain, I believe you are about to break my fingers." An eyebrow rose.

The Captain released Spock's hand and stood up, embarrassed.

"Thank you, Jim. You saved me."

The simple statement, gently made, removed Kirk's embarrassment and awakened his curiosity. He sat down again.

"I didn't sense any contact in the meld, Spock; how did I help?" His voice was still not quite steady.

Spock appeared to consider for a moment. "You did not sense contact because your mind was not quite open to me, Jim. It was beset with your own sense of quite illogical guilt. It was trying to contact you which brought me to myself. My consciousness was very deeply buried. The Vulcan Healers tried mind contact, but it was not successful. I knew they were there but I was too tired to make any effort. I heard your call, and answered weakly, but you were too emotional to be able to listen. I was still tired, wanted to rest, but I had to tell you that you were wrong, that I had not lied to you. I had gathered all my strength to reach you when you broke the meld and I woke up. Jim, I did not lie to you. There should have been no danger. But the Katra transfer process was... interfered with, interrupted; something joined with Stomack and myself and wrenched T'Rea's Katra from us. The mental trauma was powerful. Stomack is dead, is he not?"

"Yes, how..."

"There is no resonance where a resonance should exist." Spock closed his eyes and went very still.

Kirk tensed. "Spock?"

"It is all right, Captain, I... There is now no sign of the Presence, the force that invaded the transfer ceremony, but I am uncomfortable with the knowledge of its existence; there may be danger."

"You mean you've a gut feeling the trouble's not over," Kirk smiled.

"If you must put it that way, Jim."

Spock started to get out of bed to strong objections from the Captain. The disturbance aroused McCoy, who stood in the doorway in open-mouthed amazement for an instant. Then he was all physician.

"Spock, where do you think you're going? Stay in that bed."

"Doctor, I assure you that I am quite recovered, if a little tired."

"If you admit to tiredness you stay there. For one thing you haven't eaten for days. Anyway, what happened?"

"In what way, Doctor?"

"How come you're no longer comatose, Spock?"

"Because I have woken up."

"Dammit, *how* did you wake up?" He looked towards Kirk in frustration, then intuitively, he knew.

"Oh, I see. Quite simple," he remarked, then left the room, calling for a nurse.

Kirk looked quizzically at Spock, his eyes asking a question.

"The good Doctor has much insight, Jim." He gently touched Jim's face, which still bore the marks of his grief. "He had some clues too. Human emotion is a great betrayer."

"I really don't care, Mr Spock - it got you back. For once being selfish..." he paused "...paid off!"

Spock looked directly at the Captain. "Jim, to bestow your affection on someone is not selfish; it is a great gift, one which you give freely, asking nothing in return. I..."

Further conversation was prevented by the arrival of McCoy with the duty nurse, followed closely by Sarek and Amanda.

Amanda was smiling broadly as she said to Sarek, "So, my Husband, Human hope wins over Vulcan logic after all." She turned to Kirk. "Thank you, Captain. Doctor McCoy says that you saved my son."

Kirk was acutely uncomfortable, dreading being asked to explain what had occurred. Sarek was looking at him curiously, but Spock came to his rescue.

"Father, the Captain attempted a mind-meld with me. Although it was imperfectly achieved, it seems that contact with someone who knows me well was more efficacious than contact with a Healer, despite the Healer's greater skill. The phenomenon would make an interesting study."

Sarek looked thoughtful. "Yes," he said. "Perhaps there is a certain logic in the case. I would agree that it should be referred to the Vulcan Institute for further research."

He gave Kirk another appraising look which made the Captain uncomfortable. How much, Kirk wondered, had the Ambassador's assessment of the situation told him? And why was he, Kirk, anxious to protect himself from Sarek? The answer was immediately available. It was not his own privacy he was conscious of, it was Spock's. The father frowned on emotion in the son. Though controlled, Spock's response to Kirk in the meld had been an

emotional one.

The Captain came out of his reverie realising that Spock was briefing his father on the more worrying aspects of the case.

"In my memory, it seems that the Presence wanted T'Rea's Katra, rather than our minds, but I cannot be sure. This makes all mind contact between telepaths dangerous as it gives the Presence a way in. It is essential that the Vulcan Council be briefed on what has occurred".

Sarek nodded and withdrew with Amanda, who touched her fingers lightly to Spock's face before she left.

McCoy tapped Kirk on the shoulder. "Come on, Jim, off you go to your cabin and sleep. The nurse is going to give Spock a bed-bath and then he's going to eat and sleep too. I... Spock, where are you going?"

"I am quite capable of employing the sonic shower, Doctor. After that I will submit to your tender ministrations. I will even eat. But the nurse is not - *not* - going to give me a bed-bath." He disappeared into the bathroom, leaving McCoy grinning.

"You're a good psychologist, Bones," said Kirk, also smiling. "Lord, I'm tired. But I'm hungry too. I'll have a bite with Spock," he held up his hand to forestall the protest, "then I promise that I'll leave quietly."

"Well, don't discuss business," growled the Doctor.

In the event McCoy left them to it for a considerable time as he was called to surgery. They ate at first in companionable silence, then they discussed the train of events at some length.

"Jim, do you feel any resonance from my mind now?"

"No, Spock, I'm not aware of anything. Why?"

"Curiosity. We have been linked on occasions before - at my instigation and for a specific purpose, for example the affair with the Melkotians - but you are supposed to be psi-null. You should not have been able to achieve a link as you did, or to maintain it as you are doing."

"Maintain it?"

"I am aware of your mind, Jim."

"You mean you're reading it?"

"Not reading - impressions come over. For example, I knew you did not wish to explain our experience to Sarek, and I felt your desire to stay when McCoy tried to send you off."

"How long have you had this... contact?"

"Only since you melded with me. It will probably fade. But I mention it because the power of the Consciousness that violated my mind was so strong..."

Kirk noticed the choice of words with interest. Intrusion into a mind - an unacceptable and violent act - a violation. Something occurred to him.

"Spock, was, or is, my intrusion into your mind a violation?"

"No, Jim. You saved my life and I can shield against the present contact if I wish to. However, I find the contact quite acceptable."

Kirk was surprised. Spock was admitting his friendship in his own fashion. Kirk felt pleased, even honoured.

Suddenly he realised that Spock was looking at him fixedly, his eyes twinkling.

Kirk blushed, then said with humour, "Eavesdroppers deserve what they get. Goodnight, Spock." Still smiling, he returned to his quarters.

The next day Kirk was on the Bridge in contact with Starfleet requesting permission to stay in present orbit pending investigation into the force which had incapacitated his First Officer. Spock had to stay, and the Captain was most anxious to be with him this time. In the event T'Pol had already contacted the Federation Council asking for the Enterprise to be assigned to the mission, so Kirk's path was smoothed.

The Bridge doors opened and Spock appeared. Kirk looked at the Vulcan in surprise.

"Does McCoy know you're here, Spock?"

"Yes he does," answered the Doctor, appearing from behind Spock, "and he is not pleased about it. However the Vulcan Council have asked your F.O. some questions and he says," McCoy placed strong emphasis on the word "that he needs access to the Bridge computer."

"You do?" asked Kirk.

"I do, Captain," replied Spock imperturbably.

"Welcome back, Spock," commented the Captain.

Spock went to his science station, then turned to Uhura.

"Lieutenant, I want to patch communications from this computer to

the complex at the Vulcan Science Academy."

McCoy, watching, made a noise like "Harrumph," and left.

"Mr Spock, you know that you could have used the terminal in Doctor McCoy's office," said Uhura with a gleam in her eye.

"Could I, Lieutenant? Well, never mind." He crossed to the command chair, where the Captain was regarding him with amusement.

"Captain, I want to try an experiment. I want to open my mind to the Presence. I wish to institute a very light meld with you. Though you are obviously not completely psi-null you seem only receptive to my mind, so you should be safe. If I get into difficulties, you will be able to sense it through the link and pull me back."

"No, Spock, it's too dangerous for you. I..."

"I do not think we will be in danger, Jim. This time I know what to expect. I cannot think of another way of tackling the problem."

"I don't like it, Spock."

"Neither do I - but we have to try something."

"We should have McCoy present. He won't like it either."

"The good Doctor will not be pleased."

Back in Sickbay McCoy looked on in disgust as Spock placed his hands in the meld position. Watching, the Doctor

saw Jim's face soften, then smile. As Spock dropped his hands the Captain gripped his First Officer's shoulder.

"Be careful, Spock, please."

"Believe me, Jim, I have no suicidal tendencies."

Spock settled himself in a position of meditation, then relaxed. Kirk felt the Vulcan's mental shields drop, and closed his eyes as he had been instructed.

At first there was nothing, then as he became attuned he saw scenes from Spock's childhood and youth on Vulcan. He caught feelings, fleeting, but unmistakable. Sorrow; rejection; love for Amanda; curiosity; love for an animal, a pet - I-Chaya?; sorrow at the animal's death; and on through Spock's life. The emotions became controlled, then almost disappeared, replaced by aloneness and a driving sense of duty, mingled with respect for - Christopher Pike. Then the meeting with one James T. Kirk, and a little thrill of startlement at a loneliness pierced. Then reluctance to acknowledge regard. A desire to retreat from the developing relationship, the formation of a resolve to leave the ship, and the resolve crumbling. And on to the present day. Suddenly Kirk realised that he was being given this insight as a gift. McCoy saw him smile again, and suddenly felt an outsider.

And then the Presence came. Kirk felt a probing of Spock's mind and Spock tensed. The Presence was searching for something - Kirk sensed disappointment. Then Spock was projecting fear and explaining how the Presence had caused him damage. Kirk held his breath, tense, ready to defend Spock, though he was not sure how. Suddenly he knew that the Presence had become aware of him, and he felt tendrils creeping into his mind. Then Spock saying, *No, This One is too*

delicate, and the withdrawal of the probes. And Kirk knew that the Presence was benevolent, that its destruction of Stomack had been an accident. He sensed its sorrow and guilt.

He became aware that Spock was giving more of himself to the meld. He wondered in fear if this was by his own volition or whether the Presence was ignorant of its strength. He called out to Spock in warning, and found himself drawn into a 3-way communication. He was identified by Spock as *This One* - his name was not used.

The Presence was a wandering field of thought-energy - a creature, an intelligence searching for like-beings. In the Katra of T'Rea it thought to have found one - disembodied thought, vibrant with life and energy; but in its enthusiasm to contact the Katra, it had simply absorbed it. T'Rea's Katra was not gone - it was part of the Presence, and it was from the Katra that the Presence had learned what it had of Vulcans. It had approached Spock with more caution.

But what of This One? the Presence questioned. *He is not as thee. He is - Human - drawing the term from Spock's mind. His mind is disordered but it is interesting. He cares greatly for thee, and thee for him. He is thy Thy'la? The term is understood from the Katra.*

Kirk let his ignorance be known and it was immediately satisfied. The term meant friend, brother and more. Kirk understood the relationship, but there was no Terran term to convey it.

This One, he has offered himself to protect thee - it is not something of which he is capable, but he makes the offer anyway. This rashness, it is characteristic of his species? Thee finds it enticing? No, fascinating? Perhaps both, as the terms are understood by this Presence.

Kirk felt himself drifting, and was

suddenly pulled to the now by McCoy's hand on his arm.

"Jim, finish it. You're both sinking too far."

He communicated the danger and the Presence instantly started to withdraw, gently first from Kirk, then more slowly from Spock.

As Kirk's mind cleared he experienced a pang of utter loneliness. As it faded he came back to reality in time to catch Spock, who had toppled forward. He held the Vulcan in his arms as McCoy examined him.

Spock stirred before the Doctor had finished and looked up into the Captain's face. "It is all right, Jim, I am undamaged."

McCoy relaxed. His mediscanner agreed with Spock's own assessment. He moved away, watching the pair, aware of the closeness between them, knowing that it stemmed from the experience they had just shared.

The Captain helped Spock to his feet from the floor where they had both ended up, then assisted him to a chair, into which he sank gratefully. He lowered his head into his hands.

"The creature is going to return T'Rea's Katra; it believes it can do so intact."

He slumped forward, unconscious. Kirk paled, but McCoy forestalled his worry.

"He's only asleep, Jim. Let's put him to bed. You need to go to."

The Presence transferred the Katra of T'Rea into her Globe of Eternity during

a ceremony attended by all her relatives and James T. Kirk. Afterwards, Spock took leave of his parents. While Sarek and Spock were talking Amanda approached Kirk.

"Captain, thank you for what you have done for my son."

"It was a happy accident, Amanda. I didn't expect the meld to work."

"I didn't really mean that, James. You have given him what no one else has succeeded in giving him - a respect for his Human half. It was my one great sorrow that I was never able to impart that to him, but you have succeeded where I failed and I am glad of it."

"Your son is my friend. I don't think of him as half Human or half Vulcan - he is just Spock."

Amanda smiled as Sarek rejoined her. Kirk and Spock transported back to the Enterprise.

As the pair stepped off the transporter pads, Kirk saw Spock stiffen. A second later, he sensed a brief touch on his own mind. The Presence said goodbye, then it was gone; and after its passing Kirk felt the same sense of isolation that he had before.

You are not alone, Jim; I am with you.

But the Vulcan had not spoken; the words were in his mind. He grinned in delight.

I'm receiving you, Spock.

Yes, said Spock gently. *I think it is time to teach you some Vulcan mental disciplines so that you can broadcast or shield at will.*

And in the next weeks he did.



A STAR TREKKER'S WISH

I long to journey to the stars,
To travel in deep space,
And journey with others of similar mind,
To seek out new planets and civilisations.

Each night I look up at the stars
With this wish keep in my heart -
To go where none have gone before,
To explore the vastness of deep space,
To accept its dangers and its beauty -
For this, to me and others,
Would be a pleasure, not a duty.

I am not alone in this wish.
For there are others who, like me,
Would give anything to be
Offered the chance to journey to the stars.

Alas, this wish cannot be,
For at this point in history
Only a select and lucky few
Are chosen to journey into space.

Perhaps one day our children
Will one day venture into space
And meet in peace and friendship
Beings of an alien race.

I hope that one day this wish will come true,
For surely there can never be
A more sincere hope that mankind will grow enough
And be ready to extend the hand of friendship
To aliens who are so different from ourselves.

Christine Jones



WE THREE TREKKERS

(To the tune of: We Three Kings)

1

We three trekkers of fandom are,
In search of cons we travel so far;
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

CHORUS:

O ship of wonder, ship so bright,
Ship whose surface is silver-white,
Spaceward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us by thy friendly sight.

2

Here we are, at last, again,
Although we nearly missed our train,
Star Trek forever, ceasing never,
This is our constant refrain.

CHORUS

3

In search of zines and books are we,
Autograph hunters are we three;
Never failing, never tiring,
We see all there is to see.

CHORUS

4

Behold us now, bankrupt and broke,
Not even enough to buy us a coke.
Homeward, homeward, are we bound,
Laden with all we found.

CHORUS

Christine J Jones



OBSERVING DISTANT PLANETS

Upon a far and lonely shore I wandered undisturbed
 Observing distant planets
 Spheres massive and inert
 Forsaken in their atmosphere, they grandly sail the sky
 Stripped of clouds and cumulus, the heavens opened wide
 Laid bare to all but vastness
 Reddish bronze in naked sierra
 Titanic globes of gibbous beige and white
 Arise and bloom in beauty severe.

The further moons show pale, distant, foggy companions
 Crowding in like watchers
 They are beyond understanding.
 Planets spin and shift, rising nebulous and near
 Then far and distant, closer: they dance the dance of the
 spheres
 Majestic and inspiring
 Wreathed in countless gases
 Cloaked in webs of mystery and remote seas like glasses
 The planets now begin to sink, giving way to magic night
 Stars begin to shine as the moons glow nebula-white.

Alone I stand and watch as the planets end their show,
 Closing on their mystic dance
 Fingers of night creep in - the curtain now has fallen
 To the planets so great and serene
 Misty twinkling stars peep out.
 Applause would seem obscene.
 The silence seems enormous as nature gives a satisfied sigh.
 The whispering in the grasses is all this is indicated by.

I creep away unnoticed by those silent distant worlds
 I wonder when they'll come again
 To rage and sail and swirl
 Titanic globes and misty moons: worlds of forest green
 Ageless and alien, lost in gravity
 Worlds that swim in mists, unknown and never seen.
 And I am on a distant, lost shore
 Hearing the splash of ocean spray
 Alone and never tended
 Space vessels don't come my way
 I've only animals for companions; their cries assail the night
 For I am on a distant planet,
 Lost amid space-flight.



Linda A. Carter

